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El-Baz,
portrait
of the week
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Red Sea clash

YEMENI naval patrols clashed with Eritrean forces this week over Lesser Hanish, a disputed uninhabited island at the mouth of the Red Sea. A Yemeni military official said yesterday that Yemeni artillery guns deployed on the neighbouring island of Zogor and Eritrean guns on Greater Hanish island fired at each other.

The Yemeni cabinet had accused Eritrea on Tuesday of occupying Lesser Hanish in a flagrant violation of an accord signed between Sanaa and Asmara in Paris in May, when the two sides agreed to submit their long-running dispute to international arbitration.

Beirut talks

SYRIAN Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Shara held talks on the peace process yesterday in Beirut with Lebanese President Elias Hrawi. Beirut and Damascus have rejected an Israeli proposal that Tel Aviv withdraw its troops from South Lebanon if Hizbullah guerrillas fighting the Israelis there were disarmed first.

Meanwhile, Israel's army chief, Amnon Shabak, told a closed session of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee that the army had indications but no proof that Hizbullah had acquired rockets with a range of 40km, enabling it to attack larger areas of northern Israel than in the past. The AP news agency had previously reported that the group only had Katyusha rockets with a range of up to 22km.

Walker brief

US AMBASSADOR to Egypt Edward Walker said yesterday that President Hosni Mubarak's recent visit to the United States brought home positive results on the political and economic levels. The talks between Mubarak and President Clinton dealt primarily with "movement toward the achievement of peace" in the Middle East, Walker said.

Mubarak's talks "resulted in a clear message to the international investor that Egypt is a suitable place for investment," Walker said. He spoke to reporters after signing an agreement with Egyptian Economy and International Cooperation Minister Nawal El-Tatawi under which the United States will provide an additional \$15.6 million for the population and family planning project.

Inside job?

A REPORT issued by the Supreme Court in Argentina said the 1992 bomb blast which destroyed the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29 people and wounding 100 others, was caused by explosives placed inside the building and not by a terrorist car bomb outside as previously disclosed.

The report drew immediate criticism from the Israeli ambassador in Buenos Aires, Yitzhak Aviran. He said French, Israeli and American investigators had already established that the embassy was attacked from outside and accused the court of lying to cover up its lack of action for four years. No suspects have been charged in the case yet.

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Gloom shrouds talks

YESTERDAY's resumption of negotiations between Israeli government officials and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) failed to dispel fears that Israel is striving to sidestep the land-for-peace principle.

The first formal talks in six months came one day after Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai announced the deployment of 300 mobile homes to expand classroom space in the West Bank settlements. This is the first practical measure towards settlement expansion since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to power. It came a few weeks after he announced the lifting of the four-year-old partial freeze on expansion of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.

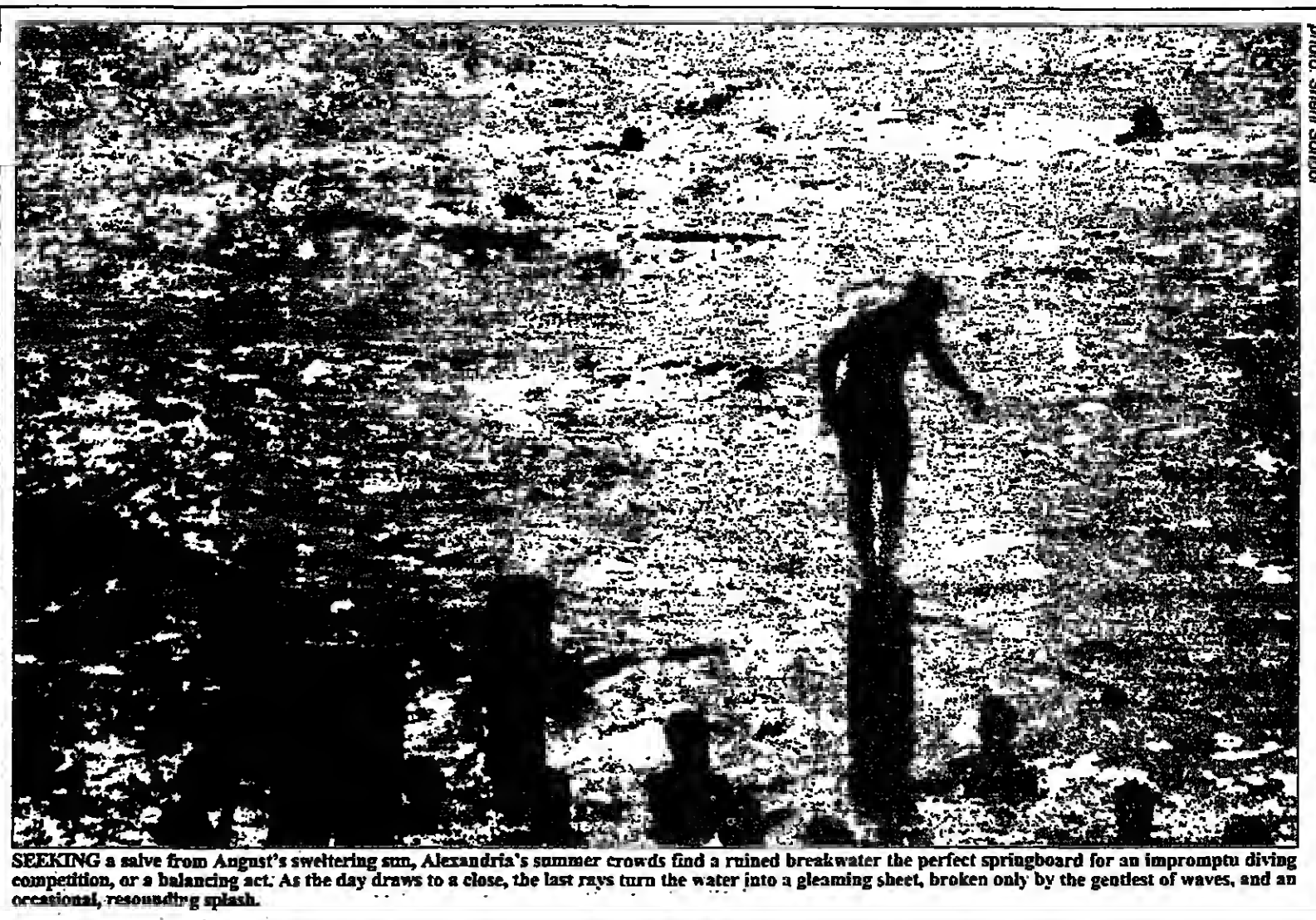
It was not just the timing of the resumed talks that reinforced the pessimistic atmosphere prevailing among Palestinian officials. Yesterday's meeting of the joint civilian affairs committee, held in a hotel in Jerusalem, was a low-key affair. As expected, the priorities of both sides conflicted. Palestinian negotiator Jamil Tarifi, the official in charge of civilian affairs for the PNA, said that the Israeli government's decision to unfreeze the settlements expansion was at the head of the Palestinian agenda.

The long list of Palestinian demands was matched by an equal number of Israeli complaints, characteristically dominated by security concerns. Significantly, General Oren Shabor, coordinator for Israeli activities in the Occupied Territories, led the Israeli side. His spokesman, Shlomo Dror, said after the meeting that the Israelis objected to Palestinian political activities in Jerusalem, unauthorised housing construction in the West Bank areas under joint Israeli-Palestinian control, and the abuse of VIP travel permits issued to Palestinian officials.

"We hope that this meeting is not only aimed at fooling the public, but at achieving results," Tarifi told reporters, voicing Palestinian discontent with the nature of the talks which were confined to technical discussions on civilian cooperation in the Occupied Territories.

Dror also said that the six-month closure of the self-rule areas, imposed after Hamas and Jihad suicide bombings in February, was to be eased. Israel announced recently that an additional 10,000 Palestinian day labourers would be allowed to enter Israel from the West Bank and Gaza, bringing the total number to 40,000.

PLO leader Yasser Arafat, who refused to comment on the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian talks, angrily remarked that the move to expand settlements was "a breach of what has been agreed and what has been signed". (see p. 4)



SEEKING a salve from August's sweltering sun, Alexandria's summer crowds find a ruined breakwater the perfect springboard for an impromptu diving competition, or a balancing act. As the day draws to a close, the last rays turn the water into a gleaming sheet, broken only by the gentlest of waves, and an occasional, resounding splash.

Ankara looks east

Is Ankara merely balancing its regional ties, or does Erbakan's deal with Tehran signal a major policy shift? Hoda Tawfik in Washington and Rasha Saad in Cairo report on the ramifications of the \$20 billion Turkish-Iranian natural gas agreement

Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan spent three days visiting Iran this week, concluding a deal that sent shock waves through US officialdom. The White House was furious, as its efforts to isolate Iran received a stinging slap in the face.

Erbakan signed three wide-ranging economic agreements with Tehran, including a \$20 billion gas deal. Under the deal, Iran will export a total of 190 billion cubic metres of natural gas to Turkey over 22 years.

"It clearly involves a long-term relationship," said a Pentagon official. "The Turks have not told us all the details of how this contract is going to work." The US is dismayed that its long-NATO ally in the Middle East is "pushing toward a broader and more active relationship with Iran," as one White House official put it.

The general reaction of the administration is that this deal's conclusion sends the wrong message to Iran," declared US State Department spokesman Glyn Davis.

The trip was Erbakan's first official visit abroad since he took office in June and precedes excursions to other Islamic countries, including Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Turkey went ahead with the transaction although the US had warned Ankara that it might face sanctions if it made the agreement with Tehran. "A last-minute tele-

phone call from assistant Secretary of State Peter Tarnoff to the Turkish Foreign Ministry failed to head off the deal," a US State Department official said.

A controversial new US law came into force last week which requires the American president to punish non-US companies which make new investments of more than \$40 million in Iran's oil or gas sectors. The US accuses the two countries of supporting terrorism.

It is obvious that America is deliberately trying to appear calm about the gas deal. The US administration is saying it is too early to tell whether the agreement will trigger economic sanctions. According to Pentagon officials, Ankara is a valuable strategic ally of the US and it is very important that American-Turkish relations are not disturbed.

Erbakan's Iranian visit has been regarded as a challenge to US foreign policy. Observers say, however, that the Turkish-Iranian gas deal was not initiated by Erbakan but was supposed to have been signed by the previous Turkish government in January. They suggest that former Prime Minister Tansu Ciller may have postponed the deal to appease the US.

Egyptian political writer Fahmy Howeid, an expert in Iranian affairs, said in comments to *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Erbakan's deal with Iran should be regarded as a

"bold move". He believes that it is unlikely that Washington will translate its anger into actions against Turkey, pointing out that Turkey has recently given the US some concessions.

"Turkey renewed the presence of the US-led multinational force protecting the Kurds on its soil. It also signed the military deal with Israel. In return, Turkey has taken steps to pursue its own interests," he explained.

Bulent Koces, foreign news editor of the *Turkish Zaman* daily, believes that Turkey is a multi-faceted country. "While it is establishing good relations with the Muslim world, it can also continue its good relations with Western countries, especially the US, and even Israel," he said in a telephone interview with the *Weekly*.

The issue of security was at the top of the agenda of the talks Erbakan held in Iran. The Turkish prime minister said afterwards that both countries would cooperate to establish "peace and order and wipe out terrorist activities" in the region. He was referring to the activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been waging a 12-year fight against Ankara for an independent Kurdish homeland.

Moreover, Erbakan called for a four-way summit between the countries directly affected by the Kurdish problem — Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. Koces claims

that the PKK is supported by neighbouring Syria and Iran, but he believes that Turkey's new government is trying to start an initiative to build mutual trust between these countries.

"Iran and Turkey are trying to come together with the Syrian and Iraqi governments to solve regional problems without the involvement of the US, European states and Israel," Koces said. Besides the Kurdish problem, water has been a bone of contention between Turkey, Syria and Iraq for years.

According to Koces, the rapprochement in Turkish-Iranian relations is very important not only because it will decrease the security threat in both countries, but also for economic reasons. The two sides additionally signed a memorandum of understanding to bump up trade between them from \$960 million to \$2.5 billion annually. Iran also agreed to increase crude oil exports to Turkey from four million tons a year to five million tons.

Relations between Turkey and Iran have had their setbacks in the past. Ankara has suggested that Tehran may have been behind various terrorist attacks which were blamed on Islamist militants in Turkey. Ankara has also accused Iran of backing rebel Kurds. The two countries each expelled four of the other's diplomats on charges of spying in April. (see Editorial p. 8 and Close-up p. 9)

Cairo maintains momentum

While Bill Clinton may have little time for anything other than his upcoming battle with Bob Dole, Cairo is not ready to wait till next November. Nevine Khalil follows Egyptian peace efforts

A flurry of diplomatic activity by President Hosni Mubarak and his aides indicates that Egypt has no intention of allowing Middle East peace efforts to stagnate while the Clinton administration is tied up with preparations for the upcoming presidential election in November. In forging ahead with its role as the regional peace-broker, Cairo was not deterred by the hawkish positions taken by Israel's new Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

An Arab summit at the end of June confirmed Egypt's leadership in the Arab world, with Mubarak emerging as a spokesman for an Arab bloc dedicated to a comprehensive peace in the region. Netanyahu, who visited Cairo last month, was told by Mubarak that the Arabs will only accept the land-for-peace formula as the basis of future negotiations and that they will give their government some time before demanding action. Mubarak, during a five-day trip to Washington earlier this month, won assurances from the United States that it remains committed to an active role in the peace process. Egypt has repeatedly urged that the US should not relinquish its international responsibilities because of domestic matters such as the presidential election.

And yet Cairo stepped in to fill any vacuum that could result from America's preoccupation with the election, fearing that inaction might put regional peace efforts on ice. However, groundbreaking results are unlikely before the dust of the election battle settles down by the year's end. As Mubarak put it last week: "We shouldn't expect anything soon."

In pressing ahead with its peace broker's role, Cairo is drawing on its long experience of peacemaking with Israel as well as its strong ties with all parties to the negotiations.

Egyptian diplomats confirmed that Cairo's diplomatic efforts were stepped up following Mubarak's return from Washington and Osama El-Baz, Mubarak's chief political adviser, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that a "good part" of the current contacts between the parties are channelled through Cairo.

In the space of four days, Mubarak met with Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad in Alexandria, Saudi Arabia's King Fahd in Jeddah and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in Cairo, keeping the spotlight focused on the peace effort. El-Baz, however, rejected suggestions that Egypt was temporarily taking over the American role. "We do not believe that one country can replace another," he said, "but what we can do is keep the peace momentum going." In confirming that the American commitment is not flagging, El-Baz said that Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Dennis Ross, the peace process coordinator, will embark on separate tours of the region in the coming few weeks.

Mubarak, in his meetings with the Arab leaders, acted to forge a unified Arab position to deal with the new regional reality that resulted from Netanyahu's rise to power. According to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, Mubarak and Arafat expressed "deep concern" over Israel's decision to lift the ban on the expansion of settlements in the Occupied Territories.

Both Egypt and the Palestinian leadership, Moussa told reporters on Saturday, were urging Israel to "put an end to any measure which could block progress on the Palestinian track." Zohdi Al-Qedra, Palestine's ambassador to Cairo, said that because of Mubarak's efforts and confidence in Egyptian diplomacy, "we rest assured of a solid Arab stand behind the Palestinian cause."

Additional meetings and talks between Arab leaders are expected in the hope that movement along the Palestinian track will not grind to a halt. Before Netanyahu's ascension to power, Israel and the Palestinians had opened, but then deferred, negotiations on the final status of the "territories".

Mubarak's two-hour meeting with King Fahd last Thursday resulted in agreement that the Arabs must pursue the peace process with a coordinated, unified stand based on the guidelines of the Arab summit. Saudi officials praised Mubarak's efforts, pledging continued support. Mubarak said that coordination between Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia — the three regional heavyweights that co-sponsored the Arab summit — will continue.

Mubarak travelled to Jeddah, fresh from talks on the previous day with Syria's Assad that took stock of the situation on the deadlocked Syrian-Lebanese tracks. Syria is not prepared to re-open negotiations with Israel unless the latter commits itself in advance to withdrawal from the Golan Heights — a precondition unacceptable to Netanyahu. Moreover, a "Lebanon first" proposal floated recently by Israel, offering withdrawal from southern Lebanon in return for an Arab security pledge for northern Israel, was rejected by Assad. He said the Israeli suggestion would in effect separate the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

"I say Syria and Lebanon first," remarked Assad at a joint news conference with Mubarak. "Even ask the Lebanese," he bluntly added.

Mubarak later warned that the "Lebanon first" option "could ignite a raging fire in Lebanon," adding that Syria suspects Israel of setting a trap. Moussa said that if the Israeli withdrawal offer is attached to "preconditions which impede movement on other tracks, especially the Syrian, it will not be successful."

Another aim of the stepped up Egyptian diplomatic effort is to ensure the success of the upcoming Cairo economic summit, which will lay the groundwork of regional economic cooperation. The majority of analysts believe that this cooperation will remain elusive, with many countries failing to show up at the November summit, if the peace process remains stagnant. Mubarak has repeatedly asserted that the summit's success hinges on progress toward a comprehensive peace. "If the process does not move in a positive direction, we are worried about the problems that can arise at the summit," Mubarak told journalists during the weekend. He suggested that if Israel implements the agreements signed with the Palestinians and re-opens negotiations with Syria and Lebanon, this "will create the right atmosphere for the success of the summit."

Netanyahu has kept in close contact with Mubarak and repeatedly affirmed his commitment to the accords signed with the Palestinians. He also dispatched his top political adviser, Dore Gold, to Cairo earlier this week for talks with Egyptian officials.



KURASAT ISTRATIJIYA (39)

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Alfi reports anti-terrorism successes

Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi has said that security forces recently foiled a major terrorist scheme by arresting terrorists "who were sent from abroad" before they could commit their "loathsome crimes." The suspects made detailed confessions about the planned crimes "which could have led to a catastrophe and which were prepared in some foreign countries", El-Alfi said at a rally in Helwan, attended by 2,000 students from 12 universities. He did not say how many men were arrested or disclose the intended targets of their attacks.

El-Alfi expressed confidence that terrorism is receding, and said that 94 per cent of all law-breakers are apprehended by his men. He described this percentage as the highest in the world.

"We have full information about terrorists," he said. "Terrorism is on the decline. Security men are provided with continuous training and they are con-

The minister of the Interior is confident that terrorism is on the decline, with security forces successfully thwarting subversive schemes exported to this country from abroad. **Jailan Halawi reports**

stantly prepared. Now we know about crimes before they take place and can pre-empt them."

In order to eliminate terrorism, people should unite in combating extremist thought, El-Alfi said. He added that he is optimistic "because people are now aware of the nature of these terrorists". El-Alfi explained that people in the past "thought that [terrorists] fought for the glory of Islam and they sympathised with them. But it is wrong to describe those who carry out terrorist acts as Islamists, fundamentalists or hard-liners. We are the Islamists but we are moderate and we fear God in everything we do. Those who kill innocent people are not true Muslims."

Declaring that terrorism is an international phenomenon, El-Alfi said that "most terrorist crimes are planned and financed abroad. The Interior Ministry has information about all the leaders and their whereabouts." Egypt has made contacts with countries sheltering terrorists to obtain their extradition, he said.

As a result of the decline of terrorism, tourism is flourishing again with the occupancy rate of some hotels rising to 100 per cent, "which is conclusive proof that Egypt is the land of security", El-Alfi said.

Terrorism is financed by illicit drug trafficking, he said, describing the two as the faces of the same coin. "There is an aggressive campaign against Egypt and its young people. Drugs are being used to ruin the young, who are the future of our nation," El-Alfi said.

Answering a student's question, El-Alfi disassociated the Interior Ministry from lawsuits filed with administrative courts to quash their decision that the results of parliamentary elections should be nullified in more than 100 constituencies because they had been rigged. He said the petitions, which were rejected by the courts, were submitted by a governmental legal department which acts as the government's legal adviser and defence attorney.

The rulings of the administrative courts were based on procedural irregularities in the elections for which the Interior Ministry is not responsible, El-Alfi said. "Our job was to secure the pol-

ling stations from the outside. Inside each central polling station, there was a judge responsible for the work inside."

El-Alfi insisted that the task of police forces during the elections was strictly to maintain security. "They would only intervene if a fight broke out between voters or candidates or in cases where the ballot boxes were turned or stolen", he said.

Answering a question about the emergency law, which has been in force since 1981, El-Alfi said the law is being invoked only in cases of terrorism, drug trafficking or threats to public order. "This law does not encroach on people's freedom or security", he said.

The emergency law gives police forces sweeping powers to arrest suspects for long periods without putting them on trial. But El-Alfi said that police forces usually obtain a warrant from prosecution authorities before making any arrests.

In defence of political life

Awad El-Morri, Chief Justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court, examines legislation affecting the formation of political parties

"The right to form political parties stems from the freedom of expression which is in turn the foundation of the freedom of association to the extent that, in most constitutions, the freedom of association and that of political parties are clothed with the same constitutional guarantee."

In this context, the Supreme Constitutional Court invalidated Article 40, sub-para 7, of Law No 40 (1977) entitling a designated committee the right to turn down applications submitted to it for the creation of any political party if it were proven, upon sound grounds, that any of its founders or leaders had advocated, encouraged, instigated or advanced principles or practices inconsistent with the peace treaty between Egypt and the State of Israel.

As a founder of the Nasserist Party, the petitioner applied for its establishment, but his application was flatly rejected by that committee on the grounds that he had signed a statement promoting antagonism towards that treaty. As a consequence, a constitutional controversy was entered into, in which the validity of sub-para 7 of Article 40 was called into question on the grounds that it was inconsistent with Article 47 of the Constitution.

In concluding that Law No 40 of the year 1977(1) is unconstitutional, the court was motivated by the following considerations:

a) That pursuant to Article 5 of the Constitution, a new political regime based on the system of multi-parties had emerged in lieu of totalitarian concepts no longer in effect. Besides, the new dimensions of the political regime are perceived as emanating from the state's democratic regime, furthered by Article 1 of the constitution.

b) That freedom and the formation of the will of the people are inextricably bound together. Inherent in the very nature of the democratic regime is the paramount freedom of expression.

In pursuance of Article 1 of the Constitution, all powers proceed from the people, the ultimate and derivative source of supremacy which empowers his representatives in the legislative body with the right to discuss matters of public concern without being inhibited or suppressed.

Moreover, through freedom of expression and by way of constructive criticism, the people as individuals, and also within the framework of political parties and syndicates, exercise effective popular control over governmental activities.

Considered as originating in and flowing from the freedom of expression are those rights and liberties of general character including intellectual, cultural and artistic freedoms; the freedom to conduct scientific research; to address petitions to the government for the redress of grievances; to peacefully assemble for the exchange of views; to print and to publish; and that of the press and of criticism.

Undeniably, the preservation of all these freedoms is ascribed to the viable protection of freedom of expression.

Needless to say that this freedom is the core of all political rights, and that centred around its values lies the whole political life, particularly in so far as the right to elect and to be elected, to join and to form political parties, and to express one's views in a public referendum are concerned.

c) Indeed, the freedom of expression, on which rests all democratic regimes, has been stressed by all Egyptian constitutions including the current one which, in Article 47, confers to every citizen the right to express and spread out his personal opinions whether by utterance or print or photography or publication or by any other means within the limits prescribed by law.

With this in view, that freedom extends to all forms of expression and encompasses all opinions of whatever nature with special emphasis on the exchange of political views, being directly linked with the advancement of meaningful political life, and the requisite development of a democratic regime.

Evidently, the role which the press plays in society has constrained the introduction of workable constitutional safeguards for its independence, driving opposition against censorship of mass media and publications as well as the denial of their suspension or administrative admonition or cancellation.

d) However, freedom of expression is not to be viewed as being beyond reasonable restrictions, since it may be subjected to limitations concerning the manner of its exercise in order to avoid the infliction of unnecessary harm, either upon others or with respect to the society.

e) Understood in this sense, an international treaty concluded, ratified and satisfying other procedural requirements for its enforcement under the rules of public international law, shall bind all contracting parties in accordance with its terms, so long as it remains valid under the rules of public international law.

However, in no way and under whatever pretext, are treaty provisions to be interpreted as impairing the constitutional right to freely discuss their implications, and to reveal and expound divergent points of view surrounding their relevancy to public concern. To claim otherwise would render obsolete the right of criticism embraced by freedom of expression.

Bearing this in mind, the challenged statute which forbids the advocacy or the promotion or the publication of ideas incompatible with the peace treaty between Egypt and the State of Israel, unequivocally barred the right to form political parties to which all citizens are entitled, an infringement intolerable under all circumstances. Sub-para 7 of Article 40 of the respective statute therefore violates Articles 5 and 47 of the Constitution.

(1) As amended by Law No 36 of the year 1979, Law No 144 of the year 1980 and Law No 30 of the year 1981.

Glory relived

The country was swept by nostalgia as posters of star actor Ahmed Zaki, made up as Gamal Abdel-Nasser, hung from the billboards. **Dina Ezzat** joined viewers of the political blockbuster

A political, semi-documentary, black and white film is proving to be the biggest box-office hit in Egyptian cinema history. Released on 3 August in 16 movie houses around the country, "Nasser '56", reconstructing 100 days of the life of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser, netted a record LE137,000 on its first day on the screens and a record LE900,000 by the end of its first week.

More than a quarter of a century after his death, not only could the late revolutionary leader still pull in the crowds, but his words could still stir them to fevered enthusiasm.

"I have been working in this cinema for a very long time," said Tarek Anwar, an usher at a downtown Cairo theatre, "and never have I seen the audience as moved or as responsive to a film, as this one."

Produced by Egyptian Television, the black and white film, starring Ahmed Zaki playing Nasser, opens on Nasser's history-making decision to nationalise the Suez Canal in July of 1956, and ends in October of the same year, with Nasser and the Egyptian people expressing their determination to resist the tripartite aggression by Britain, France and Israel, which was triggered by the canal's nationalisation.

Reconstructions of parts of two of Nasser's speeches, the Suez Canal nationalisation speech made in Manshiya Square in Alexandria in July, and the Azhar speech, made at Al-Azhar Mosque following the launching of the tripartite aggression in October, have been stirring cinema audiences to loud and prolonged applause and to shouts of *Allahu Akbar*, or God is Great.

Bringing back to life the leader of the 1952 Revolution — in moments of his greatest glory — appeared to be the reason why the film appealed to young and old alike.

Like many of the 70,000 men and women who watched the film in its first week, Mohamed Zakaria, the 55-year-old owner of a car repair workshop, did not go to the cinema simply to watch a film but to re-live a chapter of the nation's struggle for independence and dignity. "This is a memorable part of the life of the eternal leader Gamal Abdel-Nasser," Zakaria said as he stepped out of the downtown cinema. Looking very much moved, he added: "I lived those days and clearly remember them. Watching this movie brings back all the national glory of that time."

For Mohamed Ahmed, a 65-year-old taxi-driver, Nasser "was the full embodiment of all our dreams of independence and pride."

Zeinab Abdel-Hamid, a 45-year-old civil servant, shared the same sentiment. "For our generation, Nasser was national pride incarnate. Even after the 1967 defeat, he continued to signify national pride. This is why the people refused to let go of him after the setback," she said.

Abdel-Hamid took a day off from work to go watch the movie with her husband and 14-year-old son. "I do not remember the last time I went to the movies. But this is not just a movie, this is our history. It is our beautiful history that will never go away and that we will never ever forget," she said.

Another reason for the family's "outing" was the wish of the teenage son, Salah, to "see what it is that Nasser is all about." According to Salah: "We learn about him from our history books in school. He is referred to in some TV soap operas. But I needed to know more about him."

Fatma Moukhtar, a 55-year-old physician, said her brother, a devout Muslim, does not go to cinema and does not have a television set in his home. "But he came to this movie and even brought his three young sons to show them what a great hero Abdel-Nasser was," she said.



Photo: Sherif Sonbol

NGO pushes women's vote

A new non-governmental organisation has been formed to encourage women's participation in politics

Women and politics in Egypt has been the theme of much research and discussion over the last two years which have witnessed parliamentary elections and two women-oriented international mega-conferences. The newly formed Association for Egyptian Women Voters (HODA) — an acronym consisting of the first letters of the Arabic name — is going to propose ways and means to induce women to get more involved in politics, reports Dina Ezzat.

For this purpose, HODA is going to encourage as many women as possible to register their names in the electoral lists. It will also encourage potential candidates, from political parties and other factions, to run for future elections and provide support for those already set to run.

The municipal elections scheduled for later this year should be the first test of the application of this scheme. "This is one of our priorities," said Nagah Hassan, the executive coordinator of HODA. During the coming three months, Hassan says, HODA will be approaching potential voters and candidates.

"There are two main tasks in this re-

spect," she explained. The first is to help supply women with identity cards so they become eligible to vote. The second is to raise the campaign-leading skills of the candidates to make sure they know how to approach their constituencies and respond to their opponents.

The full details of the plan for the municipal elections' agenda and the entire framework of action will be discussed in HODA's first general assembly scheduled for 25 July. Attending the assembly will be the six founding members, a group of prominent sociologists and university professors, and some 160 members.

Elected to head HODA was Amina Shafiq, a prominent journalist and one of the founding members of the organisation. "I know the task ahead of us is a difficult one," said Shafiq. The heart of the problem, in her view, is that women's status in society is the "outcome of a combination of several elements of our cultural heritage, and this is difficult to shake."

The idea behind HODA came up in a seminar on women and democratic transition that was sponsored in June 1994 by

the Ibn Khaldun Centre for Developmental Studies. In the two-day event women parliamentarians from across the Arab world gave testimonies of their experience with politics and the difficulties — which sometimes amounted to harassment — that they encountered. Most of the testimonies stressed that when it comes to elections women are discouraged — by intimidation or otherwise — from running.

One recommendation that came out of this seminar was to establish a committee to provide legal and moral assistance for women candidates.

"The Ibn Khaldun Centre for Developmental Studies adopted this idea," said Hassan. "It was practical and it reflected a need for action," she added. As the idea was pondered over, it was decided to launch a group not only to support political candidates but also to encourage women to register their names and use the voting right they gained in 1956.

Last month, the new association was registered as a non-profit civil organisation.

In addition to supporting candidates and

voters, HODA will also work towards increasing political and electoral awareness by documenting women politicians' experiences, printing relevant documents, and conducting research.

For the first phase of action, HODA will focus on Cairo, and later will include other governorates in its plan of action. "Attending the general assembly will be women activists from different provinces in the Delta and Upper Egypt, and we hope to put things in motion as soon as possible," Hassan said.

Regarding the poor performance of women candidates and voters in the last parliamentary elections, HODA is going to work on giving women a better go, and hopefully more seats and votes, in the coming legislative elections in four years time.

The candidates in the last parliamentary elections were close to 3,980 candidates who contested, according to the individual system, 444 parliamentary seats. Of these only less than two per cent were women.

Today's parliament has nine women members. Five were elected and the re-

maining four were appointed by President Mubarak who has a constitutional right to nominate 10 parliamentarians.

Women's participation in the country's political life has always been minimal. In the first parliamentary elections under the 1956 Constitution, the number of female voters was only 144,983 compared to 5,575,672 men. Only two women, one in Cairo and one in Alexandria ran. They both won. In the 1964, 1969, and 1976 parliamentary elections, the number of women who won seats in parliament was between two and eight.

In 1979 a law was issued to earmark 32 parliamentary seats for women. This law was abolished, in 1987, on grounds of unconstitutionality.

Most political parties, including the ruling National Democratic Party, hesitate to field women candidates for fear of losing a potential seat.

HODA will not be working alone to change this situation. "The battle is long and tough," admits Shafiq, "we are going to need all the help we can get, and we will join hands with other NGOs who share our objectives."

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Family doctors for the countryside

Rural areas compare poorly with cities and urban population centres in terms of medical facilities. Statistics show that around 4.5 million people living in 860 villages in 11 governorates are in dire need of medical services, and the Ministry of Health and Population has launched a major scheme to meet their needs.

Sponsored by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, the plan aims at establishing 400 medical centres or clinics in underprivileged villages. "This is only the opening shot in a comprehensive effort to upgrade health services in rural areas," said Dr Hosni Tammam, under-secretary at the Health Ministry. "The target of the plan is to bring basic health services to deprived areas."

In the first phase of the project, whose execution has already begun, 100 clinics are being established in 100 villages in the Upper Egyptian provinces of Beni-Suef, Fayoum, Minya, Assiut, Sohag, Qena and Aswan as well as the Nile Delta governorates of Daqahliya, Kafri El-Sheikh, Gharbiya and Menoufiya. The first phase is targeted for completion by the end of 1997.

There is also a new philosophy behind the clinics. "They should not be restricted to providing health services only but should serve the whole community by providing comprehensive social, childhood and motherhood care and family planning services," Tammam said.

Mrs Mubarak is providing active support to an ambitious health ministry plan to bring medical care to millions of villagers in 11 governorates. **Rania Khalaf reports**

Young doctors will be given special training for a better understanding of the problems facing rural communities. "The family doctor is a new concept that needs to be adopted. He should have the responsibility of acting on the social, economic and health problems of a number of families," said Dr Ibrahim Ge'issa, director of the ministry's rural health department.

The number of governorate clinics has approached the 3,000 figure, serving nearly 34 million people. More are needed, and many of those functioning already were built in the early 1950s and need to be upgraded. Health Minister Dr Ismail Salama, announcing plans to upgrade health services, said priority will be given to deprived provincial areas as well as remote tourist destinations. The Governorate of Daqahliya, east of the Nile Delta, tops the programme list because it includes 117 villages, with a total population of half a million, lacks medical services completely.

Businessmen, companies and other philanthropists were invited to help. Cash donations

have amounted to LE8 million so far. Other donations were made in the form of land. A clinic's construction cost amounts to LE480,000.

Complaints have been made that doctors and medicines are not available at many provincial clinics. But Ge'issa responded that 11 million people have called at those clinics in 1995 to get medical assistance. The increasing number of calls as well as the shortage of budget allocations have been blamed for the poor performance of some clinics. However, the Health Ministry's budget was increased by LE 3.8 million this year.

Financial incentives were also raised in order to lure young doctors to those provincial clinics. Bedrooms will be included in the new clinics to encourage doctors to stay there for long periods, Tammam said. As a result, the number of doctors serving in the provinces is expected to exceed 3,100.

Ge'issa said that a new "family doctor" course is being taught at present at Suez Canal University to qualify doctors to deal with the social and economic problems prevailing in provincial areas. And a new centre for basic health care services has been attached to Mansoura University, focusing on the endemic diseases of the provinces, Ge'issa added.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

مركزنا من الأصل

Egypt-EU talks in limbo

As the Egypt-EU partnership negotiations drag on, the Egyptian side argues that the ball is in the EU's court, reports Niveen Wahish

After more than one and a half years and seven rounds of negotiations over the proposed Egypt-EU Partnership Agreement, the core issue of agriculture remains an obstacle to concluding the accord and setting a date for its signing. According to Ambassador Gamal Bayoumi, head of the Egyptian negotiating team, 95 per cent of the partnership's text has already been agreed upon, but the remaining five per cent, relating to exports of agricultural goods, has had both sides deadlocked.

Primarily as a result of a dispute over the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which places strict protectionist measures on agricultural imports into the EU, partnership negotiations have been at an impasse for over three months. The sixth round of negotiations, which were held late March, ended inconclusively, with the EU failing to take a decisive step towards granting Egyptian agricultural exports to the EU similar rights as those afforded to industrial goods.

According to Bayoumi, although the EU has yet to take a firm stand on agriculture, during the seventh round of negotiations, held in late July, Egyptian negotiators presented their European counterparts with a file containing thorough, up-to-date information on the Egyptian agricultural sector, which he hopes will clear up some points of contention.

Information provided in the file argues that while Egyptian agricultural exports do not present a threat to European producers, the current terms under which Egypt exports to EU member states are not satisfactory. "Our exports will not disturb the EU market because they are already there," said Bayoumi. Moreover, Egyptian agricultural exports account for only one-quarter of one per cent of Europe's total agricultural imports. The EU, however, exports to Egypt six-times this amount.

"We do not necessarily need to compete, but we can complement each other's products by exporting different strains of the crops, or attempting to meet market needs at times when there is no EU produce," stated Bayoumi.

Despite assurances and explanations from Bayoumi, decisions over the agricultural issue are slow in coming because the EU negotiating team has a limited mandate to negotiate this point. Nonetheless, Bayoumi is optimistic, maintaining that the EU team is trying hard to change the mandate in a bid to have a freer hand to negotiate this issue on behalf of the EU's 15 member states.

It is a promising sign, he said, that representatives of the EU countries sat in on the negotiations to listen to the argument. During the previous rounds, these representatives were not present at all.

With Egypt's cards on the table and the facts clearly spelled out in the file provided by Bayoumi, the ball is in the EU's court.

"We are waiting for their response," he said, adding that unless the EU makes some concessions, it will lose a major market for agricultural exports. "We cannot continue to import without being able to export," stressed Bayoumi.

While negotiators haggle over the agricultural issue, other items on the partnership agenda are being resolved. Egypt, said Bayoumi, is also particularly interested in ensuring that Egyptian citizens in EU countries receive similar rights to those granted to EU nationals at home. He also said that the Egyptian negotiating team seeks to ensure that visa procurement procedures are expedited and that officials and businessmen travelling for business to the EU countries be granted special privileges and multiple entry visas.

"We have made it clear that we are not seeking jobs for Egyptians in Europe," stressed Bayoumi. "On the contrary, we hope that the partnership will create jobs in Egypt for Egyptians."

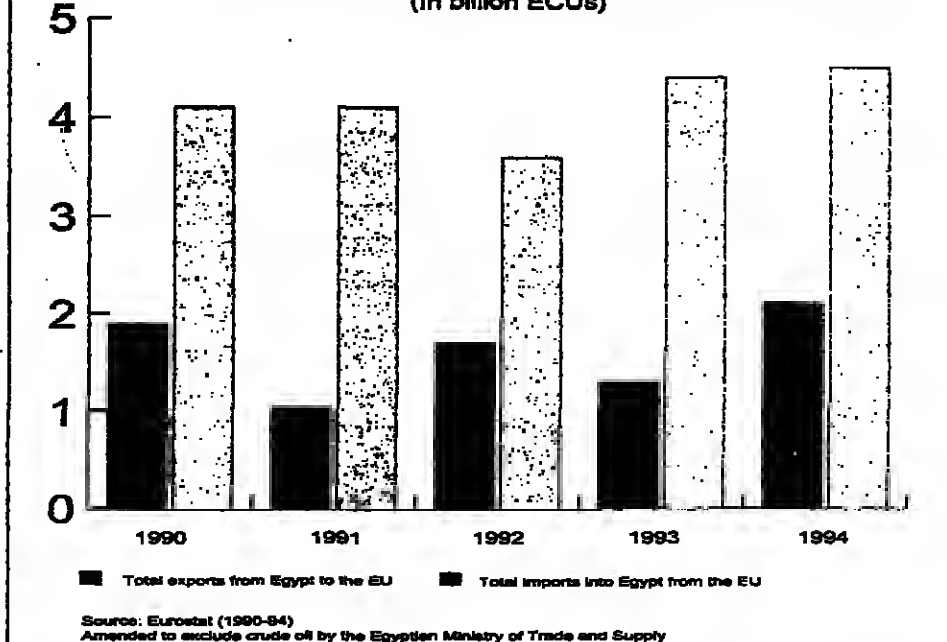
Other potentially sensitive issues have also been tackled with varying degrees of success. Bayoumi said that steps to be taken to dismantle tariffs on industrial imports from the EU, for example, will be decided upon by Egyptian authorities. However, an agreement in principle has been reached stating that raw materials, capital goods and industrial inputs will be the first to benefit from customs exemptions, while customs on finished products will be the last to go.

But, said Bayoumi, it is important for the Egyptian government to begin familiarising producers with the meaning of competition by symbolically lifting customs duties on finished products simultaneously with revoking tariffs on raw materials and goods.

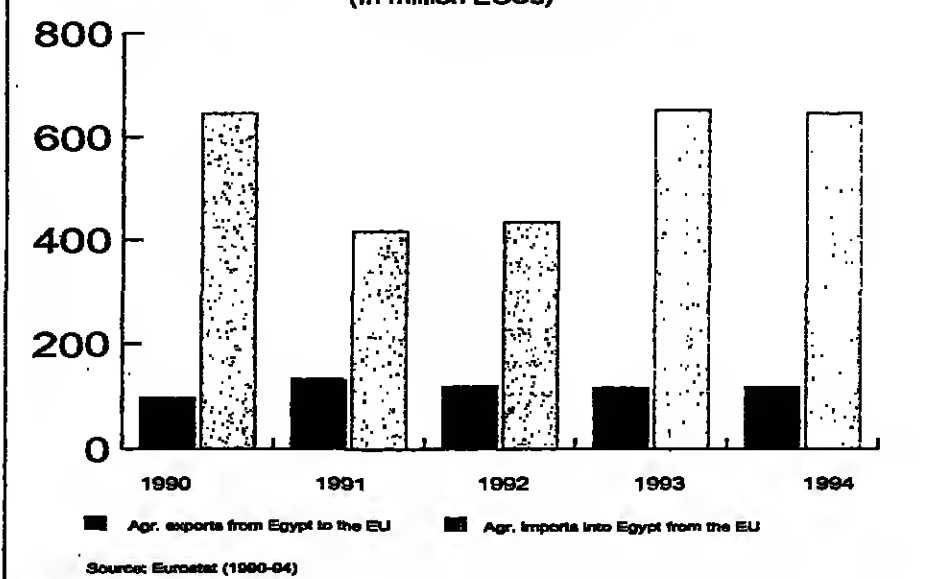
Under the agreement which calls for the establishment of a free trade area between Egypt and the EU, Egyptian industrial goods will be awarded unconditional, duty-free access to EU markets. Egypt, however, will lift duties on EU industrial exports gradually over a 12-year transitional period.

Details and individual clauses aside, however, the crux of the agreement is to promote a mutually beneficial trading environment through which Egyptian producers can work to improve

Foreign trade statistics between Egypt and the EU (1990-95)
(In billion ECUs)



Trade in agricultural products between Egypt and the EU (1990-94)
(In million ECUs)



One ECU is equivalent to around LE4.17

quality and quantity as the country accelerates liberalisation initiatives and attempts to attract more foreign investments.

For this to happen, thorny issues such as agriculture must be resolved. And, according to Ismail Sabry Abdallah, former minister of planning and head of the Third World Forum, a UN-affiliated, Cairo-based research centre, the Egyptian negotiating team's perseverance will help them "get the best they can out of this partnership agreement despite the fact that they are operating under the worst possible conditions."

In Abdallah's opinion, the Egyptian negotiators are operating from a strategic disadvantage given that the EU is carrying out similar negotiations with other North African, Mediterranean-rim countries, on an individual basis. Egypt, and the other Arab countries like Tunisia and Morocco, he stated, would have been able to secure better terms had they joined hands and coordinated their efforts. The EU,

while not vetoing this move, did not actively seek to negotiate with the Arabs as a bloc.

"If Arab countries come together, they can, in the future, demand an amendment of the terms of the agreement, in which case the EU will not refuse," said Abdallah.

In the meantime, he noted, Egypt should not expect to receive many more concessions from this agreement than Tunisia and Morocco did. Both these countries have already signed individual partnership agreements with the EU. Member states of the EU, he explained, are in favour of standardising the texts of these agreements and are unlikely to allow one to significantly differ from the other.

The key to the success of this agreement is not whether it offers the best terms, but how the terms are implemented. It is up to Egyptian producers and exporters, noted Abdallah, to benefit from the agreement by being more competitive in terms of quality, quantity and price.

Compensation approved

SOME 16,000 Egyptians, who lost money as a result of the Gulf War, have been declared eligible for compensations by the Geneva-based United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC), reports Ghada Ragab.

At a recent meeting, the UNCC's governing council approved 64,000 Category C compensation claims (for individual losses of up to \$100,000), amounting to roughly \$323 million.

Funding for these claims will be made available under the UN Security Council Resolution 986, also known as the "oil-for-food" deal, which permits Iraq to sell some of its oil to meet humanitarian needs. Thirty per cent of the proceeds from the oil sales will be earmarked for the UNCC, giving the commission nearly \$100 million each month with which to pay the claims.

However, the implementing of Resolution 986 is bound to be delayed by UN procedures. According to UNCC spokesman Walid Abdel-Nasser, the application of Resolution 986 awaits the Security Council's approval of procedures governing the sale of Iraqi oil and imports, and the subsequent distribution of humanitarian goods. In addition, the Security Council has yet to appoint monitors and inspectors for these procedures, Abdel-Nasser added.

Once the money comes in, he said, priority of payment goes to the five already-approved Category A instalments, which include those who will be compensated for being forced to depart from Kuwait as a result of the Iraqi invasion. Compensation for Category C will follow those for Category A. The UNCC has already paid all Category B claims from the proceeds generated from the sale of Iraqi oil which was in foreign pipelines at the time of the invasion.

The UNCC's governing council has formed three panels of commissioners to look into Category D, E and F claims. One panel includes an Egyptian commissioner, George Abi-Saab, professor of international law at Geneva University's Graduate Institute of International Studies. Abi-Saab was a member of the International Tribunal on the former Yugoslavia, at The Hague.

Giza grant

THE SECOND phase of a project launched in 1993 to upgrade the water supply and sewage system in Monib, Giza, has recently been completed. Financing for the project came from a 5.89 billion yen (around LE18.7 million) Japanese aid grant, of which 101 million yen (around LE320,634) was earmarked for the design phase and 5.789 billion (around LE18.4 million) for its construction and completion.

The first part of this two-tier project was to expand and improve existing water supply facilities in the south Giza area by installing, among other things, a water trunk line. It was part of an Egyptian government plan to bring supply in line with the demand. The facilities in place prior to the project's completion were able to supply only 70 per cent of demand. The second part of the project was to improve and expand sewage systems in the area.

This project is the second in Giza to be financed through a Japanese grant. The first, completed in 1991, was in the Omrana district, and was aimed at upgrading the water supply and sewage systems there.

Tourism up

FIGURES highlighted in the latest Ministry of Tourism report reveal that 1.7 million tourists visited Egypt from January to June 1996, a 31.9 per cent increase over figures for the same period in 1995. Additionally, the number of tourist nights spent in Egypt increased to 10 million, a 29.6 per cent increase over the same six-month span in 1995.

"In June alone," said Mamdouh El-Beltagi, the minister of tourism, "246,391 tourists came to Egypt, spending 1.3 million tourist nights." He added that "while the average occupancy rates in the entire fiscal 1995-96 reached 61 per cent, in the first half of fiscal 1996-97, this figure has already reached 59 per cent."

The majority of the tourists visiting Egypt, El-Beltagi noted, come from Germany, the UK, Israel, Italy, France, the US, Saudi Arabia, Libya, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

Warm up for MENA 3

A US Commerce Department delegation visiting Cairo stressed the need to promote Egypt as the springboard for regional economic cooperation during the upcoming Cairo summit, reports Ghada Ragab

A delegation of high-ranking US Commerce Department officials arrived in Cairo last week as a warm-up to the Cairo Middle East-North Africa Economic Summit (MENA), scheduled to be held in November.

The delegation, which included Commerce Department Under-Secretary for International Trade Stuart Eizenstat, had talks with Egyptian officials on promoting bilateral trade relations and preparations for the summit. The delegation's visit was the last leg of a regional tour that included stops in Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Addressing members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, Eizenstat, who was in Cairo from 7-9 August, said that the conference will provide Egypt with a unique opportunity to focus the world's business community on its economic reforms.

"We want the international business community to come here to witness the transformation of Egypt into a thriving business-friendly environment."

With US companies already expressing considerable interest in attending the conference, he noted that the US government is working to promote the summit from its end by briefing interested companies. In addition, US ambassadors to Middle Eastern capitals will travel to the US next month in order to rally additional support. A Web site has also been established on the Internet to answer inquiries from interested companies.

At a press briefing, Eizenstat confirmed that US Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Commerce Secretary Mickey Kantor will be attending the conference. He was also quick to downplay concerns that the stalled peace process would undermine efforts to expand regional economic cooperation between Israel and the Arab countries.

"At a sensitive time in the peace process it is all the more important to deepen commercial linkages because these can act as an incentive to the peace process," he said. "The summit is not

a gift to Israel. Egypt, by hosting the summit, is contributing to itself and to the region.

The summit is also an opportunity to boost intra-regional trade, which stands at less than seven per cent of the total trade volume of the countries in the region, Eizenstat said.

"It is our hope that the region will integrate itself into a huge market of 200 million consumers," he said. "We hope that investors will begin to see Egypt as an export platform for the region."

The Commerce Department official noted that the Cairo conference will differ from its predecessors in Casablanca and Amman in that it will focus on promoting business deals. The US government, he said, has already asked the major participating countries to present a list of companies interested in doing business with US companies, and business meetings are being scheduled during the conference.

Responding to a question on why US investments in Egypt continue to lag behind Egypt's efforts to deregulate the investment climate and the US government's efforts to lure US investors to Egypt, Eizenstat said that Egypt's reform efforts have still not been adequately publicised. The summit, stated Eizenstat, will be an excellent opportunity for the Egyptian government and business community to inform the international business community of these reforms.

But despite gains on the reform track, he added that there are still some serious impediments hindering the increase of US investment to Egypt, such as the absence of adequate intellectual property rights regulations, anti-trust laws, clear and consistent customs and tax regulations, and speedy commercial litigation.

Accompanying Eizenstat was one of the principal coordinators of last year's MENA summit in Amman, Judith Barnett, acting undersecretary for the Near East and Africa, and Tom Sams, senior trade specialist and Egypt desk officer at the Department of Commerce.

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Market report

Schindler leads slide

THE GENERAL Market Index lost ground for the week ending 8 August, falling from 232.57 points to level off at 228.1. The value of trading also declined, dropping from LE122.5 million the previous week to LE86 million.

On a similar trend, the manufacturing sector index lost 7.69 points to close at 293.33 points. Shares of the Arab Elevators Company (Schindler, Egypt) shouldered the biggest loss in terms of percentage of the share value. Declining by 50 per cent, Schindler's shares closed at LE5.

Eight other manufacturing sector companies, however, fared better, with the Paints and Chemical Industries Company emerging as the week's big winner. The value of its stock shot up by LE40, leaving investors beaming about the fact that their stock is now worth LE770 per share.

The index for the financial sector lost 2.9 points to close at 233.11. Shares of the National Societe Generale Bank suffered the greatest loss, declining in value by LE53.10 to close at LE325. Shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) also declined in value, losing LE10 per share to close at LE435. Construction and real estate development companies were no more fortunate. Shares of the Madinet Nasr for Housing and Development slipped by LE6 per share to close at LE107, while those of the Heliopolis Housing and Development Company inched down by LE4 to level off at LE300.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

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All set for Lebanon poll

Despite last minute contention and continuing reservations, Lebanon's Christians are taking part in the coming parliamentary elections, the second since the end of the civil war. As Zeina Khodr in Beirut reports, there will be no return to the wide scale boycott of 1992 in the polling, which is due to begin Sunday

The Lebanese parliament met on Tuesday in an extraordinary session in which it approved new amendments to the controversial election law after the Constitutional Council invalidated modifications to the old legislation on the grounds they were discriminatory.

The revised election law was passed with 65 votes in favour, 21 against, and three abstentions. The decision of the 10-member council has been praised as a victory for democracy and the constitution. Analysts also see the move as a measure to appease the opposition and avert the possibility of a boycott similar to that which marred the 1992 polls.

Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who announced on Monday his intention to run for a parliamentary seat in Beirut, urged all Lebanese to participate in the elections. The premier stated, "Anyone who boycotts the elections will be boycotting his nation."

But Christian opposition leaders in exile in France have criticised the revised law and reiterated calls for a boycott. Ex-army commander General Michel Aoun said nothing new has convinced the opposition to change its position. They had earlier denounced the law and said the polls would be controlled by Syria, the main power broker in Lebanon.

"The council's ruling is historic and a victory for the country and its citizens," said the Lebanese Association for the Democracy of Elections (LADE), a group of intellectuals and professors campaigning for democratic elections.

"The decision has created a positive atmosphere. It was a compromise that tried to subdue the opposition," said Slyman Takeddine, a political analyst and a member of LADE.

The council, an independent body established to ensure the constitutionality of laws, declared the law unconstitutional and approved a petition by 10 opposition deputies who called for its annulment. It annulled six articles, the main one setting up different electoral districts for Mount Lebanon and the rest of the governorates. The article also set two constituencies in South Lebanon — Nabatiye and Bint Jbeil — as one electoral district.

"The second article of the law discriminates in treatment between citizens, candidates and voters, in rights and duties, without stating this is an exception due to special circumstances," the council said in a ruling which cannot be appealed. It was the first time it was asked to rule on the constitutionality of a law.

Parliament amended article two in compliance

with the council's decision by stating that the divisions are one-off exceptions due to the mitigating circumstances of Nabatiye which is partly occupied by Israel and the war-displaced refugees have not all been repatriated to Mount Lebanon.

The legislature had ratified the election law in July after months of controversy with each party trying to influence the law to serve its specific political ends.

Analysts said the law was tailor-made for minister of the displaced and leader of the minority Druze community, Walid Jumblatt. The law will also reduce the number of independent or opposition Christian deputies. Jumblatt, whose power base is in the Shouf which is part of Mount Lebanon, insists on the *gada* or district as the electoral constituency. He says governorates do not ensure equal confessional representation because in certain governorates candidates would be elected by a majority from other religious denominations.

The law evoked sharp criticism from some quarters, mainly the minority Christian community, due to the exceptional status granted to Mount Lebanon. It has been carved up into six electoral districts breaching the 1989 Taif accord which set out a political settlement to end the war.

Taif stipulated all electoral constituencies should

be based on the medium electoral district or the governorate.

Mount Lebanon is largely populated by Christians with a minority Druze community. It is strongly represented in the 128-member half-Christian half-Muslim unicameral parliament by 35 seats.

The Christians said the law reduces the possibility of electing representatives who oppose Syria's influence in Lebanon.

The government said the polls will take place on schedule. Voting is scheduled to start in Mount Lebanon on 18 August. It would then continue on the four following Sundays in the constituencies of four other governorates: North Lebanon, Beirut, South Lebanon and Bekaa respectively.

According to Georges Deeb, professor of international law at the Lebanese University, the Mount Lebanon exception is justifiable. "There are Maronites and Christians all over Lebanon but the Druze are only on the mountain. There are about 500,000 Christians in Mount Lebanon living with 100,000 Druze. You cannot just marginalise a whole community especially since the Constitution is against any step that threatens cohabitation," he said. "The governorate, called for by the constitution, is a better system to eradicate sectarianism. Elections on the

governorate level will mean moderates will be elected since they owe their allegiance to all sects instead of one. The governorate constituency encourages candidates of different sects to run on joint lists and voters of different sects to vote together. But I believe this exception is justifiable."

Most Christians and many Muslims boycotted the 1992 poll because Mount Lebanon and the Bekaa were divided into districts while other areas voted on the governorate level. The boycott was also a protest against the presence of 35,000 Syrian troops in Lebanon who were supposed to have redeployed the previous year.

Christians are now deeply split over whether to boycott the current elections. But a major turning point was the decision by more than 50-strong Christian opposition personalities in Lebanon who boycotted the 1992 elections and decided to participate this year whether as candidates or voters. They believe participation is better than a boycott since their goals in 1992 were not fulfilled.

The question is will this year's poll, the second since the end of the civil war in 1990, be different from that of 1992, when the turnout was only 13 per cent (opposition figure) or 29 per cent (government figure)?

The leadership of Yasser Arafat's Fatah organisation met in Cairo this week, to reactivate the mainstream PLO organisation. Sherine Bahaa talks to leading Fatah member and PLO foreign minister Farouk Qaddoumi and reports on the meeting

What is your evaluation of the first Fatah Central Committee meeting since Likud came to power?

This meeting was held after Benjamin Netanyahu's victory in the Israeli elections and the adoption by the Likud Party of a political agenda which completely contradicts the principles of the peace process as agreed in Madrid.

Meanwhile, statements made by Israeli officials and the Israeli prime minister have obstructed international and regional attempts to establish a more comprehensive peace. These statements stand in opposition to the land-for-peace formula, complete Israeli withdrawal from Arab lands and Palestinian political and legal rights.

Israel's practice of building more settlements has shattered all hopes that the Israeli government will continue in negotiations on previously agreed bases. It has also ruled out the possibility of peace prevailing in the region leaving violence and unrest as a valid option.

Does this signal the likelihood of another Intifada?

Intifada is not a matter of decision. It is, rather, a spontaneous reaction of a person whose land is under occupation and his security is in danger.

Has the committee reached an agreement on how best to deal with the Likud?

Yes, not only with Likud but in dealing with national, Arab and international issues. Statements made by the European Union and the G7 reinforce our position warning of the consequences of stalling the peace process.

Could you elaborate on efforts to confront Netanyahu?

We underscore the importance of Arab solidarity in applying pressure on the Israeli government to adopt a more comprehensive position on the peace process.

Failing that we have to appeal to the United Nations and the Security Council. We will also try to mobilise international public opinion and other countries to impose economic measures against the Israeli government. We also expect the US, the main sponsor of the peace process to honour its guarantees. We urge the Islamic world not only to influence political decisions regarding Jerusalem but also to work towards preserving the Islamic and Coptic heritage of the city. We have made contact with the

Beyond Oslo



Farouk Qaddoumi



Palestinians weep after their home was destroyed by Israeli authorities in Qalandiyah in the West Bank on Monday. The home was destroyed because it was constructed without the authorisation of the Israeli government (Photo: AFP)

Vatican to enlist its support in this matter.

But, the settlements remain the most serious issue. We have to make the world see that the issue of expanding settlements is pushing the region to the verge of conflagration.

Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai recently announced that new settlements will be erected in the West Bank soon. Is this a covert retreat from the promised Israeli withdrawal from Occupied Territories?

We are not convinced by words but by action. In his meetings with Arab leaders Netanyahu has tried to shroud his agenda in a more acceptable guise while his government makes decisions that completely oppose the peace process.

Differences in opinion have been reported among members of the Central

Committee. How were they contained?

Differences are a natural phenomena within any group, party, or political movement. We have differed in the past over the fulfilment of the Oslo Agreements but today we all agree that the current Israeli government is closing the door on the peace process and arousing both Arab and international anger. We are dealing with each other on a democratic basis within the framework of a one institution.

Does this mean that internal differences were overcome?

Actually the main topic that was discussed was how to confront intransigent Likud policies which reject all agreements and principles. On this particular point all participants agreed.

Have you discussed the future role of Fatah?

Fatah, the mainstream of the national movement, has a big responsibility towards Palestinians. Its role is not confined to the Occupied Territories or the PNA. We also determined to preserve the rights of Palestinian refugees and their right to return.

Those outside the territories are responsible for diplomatic activity because under the PLO-Israeli agreements, Israel insisted that the PNA should not pursue diplomatic contacts with embassies.

Meanwhile, since about 55 per cent of Palestinians are outside the territories we must concentrate on unifying efforts to support the PNA in realising an independent state for the Palestinians. We announced the independent state in Algeria in 1988 and we opened embassies. A large number of friendly countries and Arab nations recognised the Palestinian state in exile. We will build on this relationship.

After what has been achieved in the peace talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians do you still envision your role from outside the self-ruled areas?

The Israeli government breached its commitments and did not fulfil any of the agreements it signed. It failed to hand over all authorities to PNA in the self-ruled areas. It still controls entry and exit checkpoints in and out of the occupied areas. It has not freed Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails. It is still in full control of imports and exports. The closure of West Bank and Gaza is imposing more hardships on Palestinian citizens. Israel is also openly pursuing its settlement policy. It has gone as far as preventing the PNA from practising its sovereignty over the Palestinian land.

It is evident that Israel, even under Rabin

and Peres, did not fulfil any of its commitments. I have said it more than once — Israel has no credibility. Rabin himself once stated that schedules are not sacred. The US was a witness and not a guarantor of the Oslo Agreements which departed from the Madrid formula. Consequently, the Palestinian track became localised and now appears to be an Israeli problem rather than a Palestinian one.

In his speech before the Knesset, Netanyahu openly said that Zionism is still alive and reinforced his commitment to the settlement policy. Israel wants to control the West Bank for four main reasons. The West Bank represents 97 per cent of the Occupied Territories. It contains subterranean water, a geographical area where the Israelis can build more settlements in addition to the 143 already erected in the West Bank and in Gaza. There are also common borders between the West Bank and Jordan River.

We cannot forget the historical significance of Jerusalem. It is clear that Israel is not interested in finding a solution to the issue of Jerusalem and Hebron.

Are these the reasons you have kept away from the self-ruled areas? How can I go back with Israeli forces occupying and encroaching on our land? And furthermore, did we fight for the return of the PLO or for the return of all Palestinians?

Oslo addressed the right of return and a committee was formed from four countries including Egypt, Jordan, Israel and Palestine to reach a formula for the return of refugees. But the refugees have still not returned home. Israel is opposed to their return to the Occupied Territories. I want to go back to Jaffa where I lived.

In short, I believe that all the agreements made were an adventure we had to undertake after our political and economic conditions deteriorated in the aftermath of the second Gulf War.

Preparations for the Cairo Economic Summit began after calls for cancelling it were made. What is your view regarding the summit and can Palestinians use it as a leverage against Israel?

I reiterate that any regional cooperation must follow a comprehensive political solution because regional cooperation suggests political harmony and if it is not available then cooperation will be incomplete.

For the first time since the Oslo Agreements were ratified, Yasser Arafat and 17 members of his mainstream Fatah organisation came together for a meeting. The gathering, which took place in Al-Andalus Palace in Cairo earlier this week, was one of those rare occasions where all members of Fatah's Central Committee, from in and outside the self-rule areas, rubbed shoulders.

Mohamed Sobeh, the Palestinian delegate to the Arab League, said that Palestinian leaders asked Cairo to host the Fatah meeting to ensure that several headline members, who refuse to travel to the self-rule Gaza Strip, would participate.

After more than eight hours of closed talks, which lasted less than two days, and ended last Sunday, Fatah's external and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation in the Palestinian National Authority, Nabil Shaath emerged smiling, saying that it was the first such meeting in which "15 out of the 18 came from inside the Territories". The three outsiders were Farouk Qaddoumi, the PLO's foreign minister who lives in Tunis, Abou Maher and Mohamed Jihad.

Fatah gets together

And while some interpreted the fact that no final communiqué was issued as a sign of disagreement, Shaath came out of the meeting with his characteristically optimistic aura, declaring that "the meeting was positive".

For Fatah members, this meeting was a much-needed step in the right direction. Members sought to consolidate the movement's base and incorporate the divergent points of view under one platform. "It was very important to formulate a programme of action, [outlining] points of understanding and commonality," stated Shaath.

The meeting was also held to discuss ways of confronting recent measures taken by the Israeli government to unfreeze the construction of Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories. "I think that the settlements are a very serious problem and... settlements and peace cannot go together," said Shaath.

But inflammatory issues like Jerusalem and the construction of new settlements, however, are not the only obstacle to peace. There are two other main hurdles that must be overcome, he said. The first are problems resulting from not implementing agreements like the redeployment of Israeli troops in Hebron, and problems pertaining to safe passage and the release of prisoners. The second, explained Shaath, pertains to the border closures that have placed Palestinians in an economic stranglehold.

Of the three main hurdles, thorny issues like Jerusalem, however, have the potential of derailing the peace process, and consequently top the Palestinian list of priorities. "We do not envisage a Berlin Wall dividing Jerusalem," said Faisal Hussein, a Palestinian official responsible for the issue of Jerusalem. "So, we must discuss a solution that will allow us to

have our capital in East Jerusalem and, at the same time, maintain openness between the two sides of the city." Israel captured East Jerusalem in the 1967 War and later annexed it, declaring all of Jerusalem as its eternal capital. The fate of the city will be decided during the final status negotiations which have been on hold since Netanyahu was elected in May on a right-wing platform that included an undivided Jerusalem as Israel's eternal capital.

The Central Committee meeting comes amidst a flurry of diplomatic moves by Arafat over the past few weeks to relaunch the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, and efforts to cement his position within the self-rule areas after he was blamed for straying away from his powerbase.

Prior to convening the meeting with the Fatah members, Arafat held talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The Egyptian leader, who returned from a trip to Washington two weeks ago, met President Hafez Al-Assad in Alexandria and travelled to Saudi Arabia to meet with King Fahd, in an effort to muster Arab solidarity vis à vis the peace process.

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'A drop in the ocean'

For the first time in six years, Iraq will be able to export oil in return for much-needed food next month, after the United States decided last week to drop its opposition to the implementation of the oil-for-food agreement. An enthusiastic Baghdad announced it was ready to resume oil exports in September.

"We expect the resumption of Iraqi crude exports in the second half of September, but that will depend on the speed with which technical details are sorted out," Abdel-Amir Al-Anbari, the Iraqi representative to the United Nations, said after the official announcement of the agreement.

Al-Anbari was referring to the various procedures that need to be carried out before the agreement is actually implemented. These include the Security Council Sanctions Committee's approval of the technical guidelines in the agreement and the appointment of the four overseers who will approve the oil contracts at UN headquarters on behalf of UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali.

Following these steps, the UN has to name the bank which will provide the account for the oil revenues and deploy the monitors who will check the arrival of the humanitarian supplies, the observers who will ensure the equitable distribution of food all over Iraq and the inspectors who will monitor oil exports from Iraq to Turkey. Finally, the day after Ghali has informed the Security Council that all preparatory procedures have been completed, oil can flow out of Iraq.

The agreement allows Iraq to sell \$2 billion of oil every six months under strict international control. The revenues will be used to buy food and medicine for the suffering Iraqi people. Most of the oil will be exported by pipeline through Turkey. Iraq was prohibited from selling oil after the UN Security Council imposed sanctions against the country following its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Oil-for-food negotiations between the Security Council and Iraq began last February. A deal was concluded in May, but the US blocked implementation of the agreement until last week, claiming it wanted assurances that food and medicine would actually reach the Iraqi people.

Ambassador Nabil Nejm, Iraqi representative to the Arab League, in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, described the agreement as meeting only "a drop in the ocean" of the needs of the people. He argued that Iraq would only see around \$1,100 million of total oil sales every six months, "if we deduct 30 per cent of the revenues to the Compensation Fund and the expenses of the huge number of observers and monitors".

Nejm added that Iraq used to import food and medicine worth some \$5 billion annually before the 1990 sanctions. "Given the increase in population, prices and inflation, it is easy to assess how far this agreement will meet the actual needs of the Iraqis," he said. Nejm argued that Baghdad agreed to "what it considered as unfair to the Iraqis" only to prove that it is willing to cooperate with the UN.

Mohamed Abdel-Jabbar, the opposition Iraqi National Congress (INC) press officer, disagrees with Nejm. He describes the agreement as a positive step towards drawing a clear line between the people and the regime — something he claims the INC has always been calling for. "Why should the people suffer from sanctions imposed against the regime because it invaded Kuwait six years ago?" he told the *Weekly*.

Abdel-Jabbar sees the agreement as a double-edged sword: "The regime can possibly benefit from it, but the people definitely will." President Saddam Hussein will try to achieve personal victory from the agreement by convincing the Iraqi people that the oil-for-food agreement was one of the achievements of his re-

gime, Abdel-Jabbar said. "The agreement will relieve Saddam of the burden of providing food for the people. Thus he will spend the budget earmarked for food in other fields, mainly arms," Abdel-Jabbar said. On the other hand, he went on, the agreement provides the people with basic needs, allowing them to mobilise their efforts against the current regime and increasing their "chances of toppling it".

Abdel-Jabbar called for the Iraqi regime to be more tightly supervised during the implementation of the oil-for-food agreement, "to guarantee that the regime does not use it for its own ends".

He ruled out the possibility of the agreement leading to the lifting of sanctions on Iraq as this is linked to the regime's willingness to bow to all UN resolutions — including Resolution 688, which requires Baghdad to end all human rights violations and reveal all information about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. "Nothing in sight proves that the regime is ready for this at the present stage," he said.

Malamoud Osman, a member of the political leadership of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front, expressed his belief that it is important for the sanctions to be lifted "because it is the people and not the regime who suffer most from sanctions". But since he believes it is not possible for the UN to lift the sanctions at this stage, he welcomes the oil-for-food agreement as partially relieving the suffering of the people of Iraq. He also called on the international community to put pressure on the Iraqi regime to open channels of dialogue with the people and take preliminary steps towards democracy and justice.

However, Osman did not sound optimistic when he predicted that the agreement would encounter a number of obstacles. He hopes that the "oil-for-food agreement would face a better fate than the land-for-peace agreement".

Quest for deterrence

New orientations in Israel's strategic thinking and the hardline policies of its new government have led Arab countries to seek increasingly advanced weapons. Galal Nassar examines the sudden interest in missiles

Since the publication of the Central Intelligence Agency report concerning Egypt's purchase of Scud C missile components from North Korea, the international media has devoted extensive coverage to the Middle East and to speculation over the reasons lying behind the apparent rush to procure a strategic regional deterrent.

On 11 July international news agencies carried reports detailing purchases of Scud missiles since North Korea began manufacturing the weapons in 1986. According to these reports some 370 Scud missiles have been exported to the Middle East in the last decade. Iran is said to be the largest regional importer, having procured 100 Scud-B missiles in 1988, supplemented by a further 100 advanced Scud C models in 1990. Following Iran in the import league table were Iraq, Syria and Libya. North Korea has denied the reports.

At the same time news reports alleged that Syria had also obtained advanced Chinese M-11 missiles capable of striking deep into Israel and Turkey. Both China and Syria denied the reports.

Many commentators in the Middle East have expressed concern that the proliferation of such reports is part of a deliberate campaign being waged against North Korea and a number of Middle Eastern countries by Israel, with American support. The aim of the campaign being to subject the defence programmes of Arab countries and Iran to international monitoring.

Major General Rida Foda, professor of Strategy and Arab National Security at the Higher Nasser Military Academy, concedes that the countries of the Middle East have indeed embarked on an arms race in order to effect a balance of forces with Israel, which they continue to perceive as a threat to their national security. He identifies two reasons underlying the stockpiling of missiles. There is, he suggests, a very clear attempt to amass a deterrent force sufficient to prevent hostile powers from attaining strategic objectives through armed aggression. But this desire is further supplemented by the need to acquire the capacity to strike at hostile countries, near or far, while avoiding direct and prolonged military engagement.

Foda includes Iran, Israel, Turkey and Iraq among countries in the region that both pose a threat and which are threatened. Ethiopia and Eritrea he excludes from the list on the grounds that whatever dangers they pose are primarily engendered by Israel. The Gulf countries, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, he views as being vulnerable.

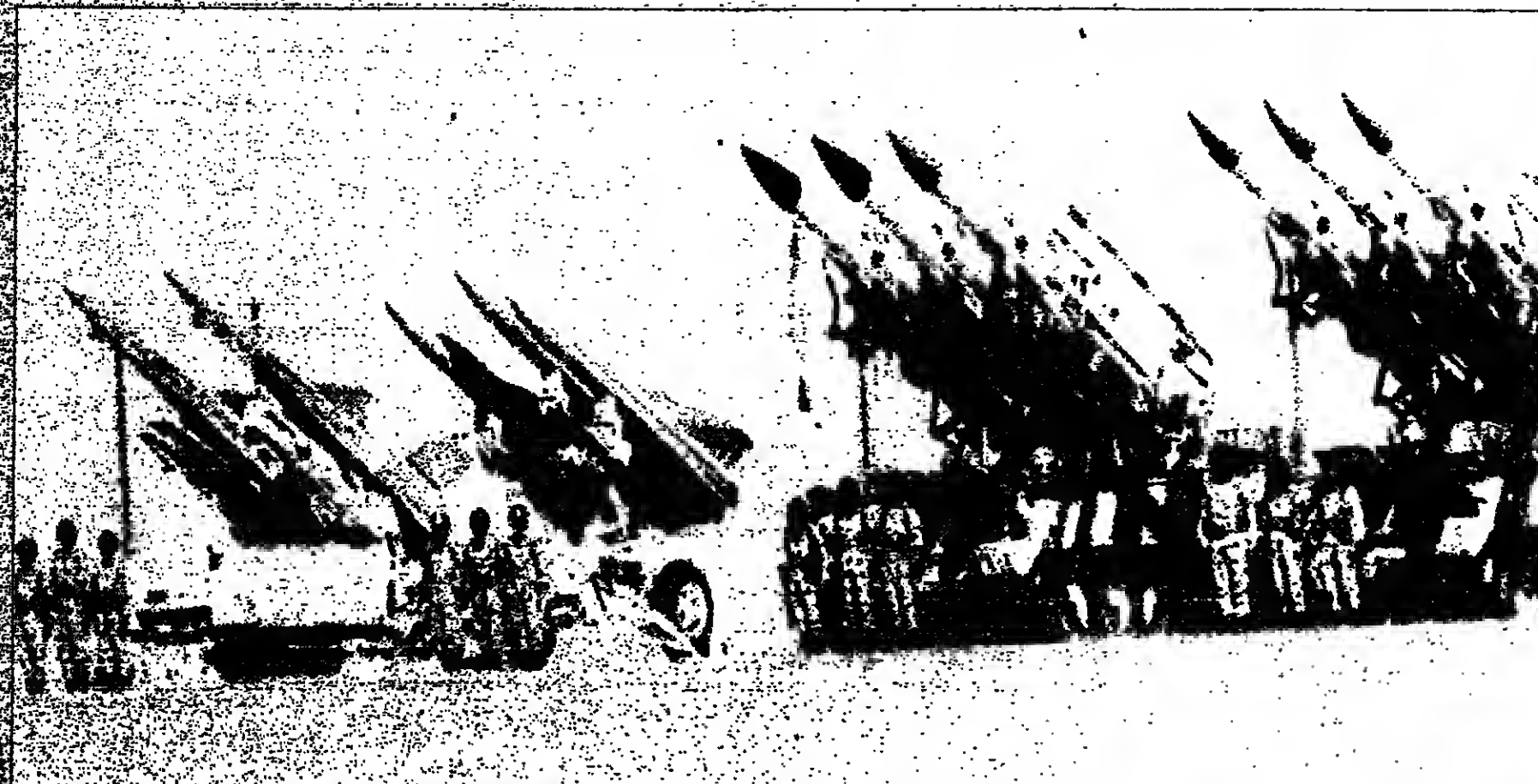
A cursory examination of Israel's new security outlook is sufficient to demonstrate that it is Israeli policy that is propelling the region into a frenzied arms race. According to Israel's new orientation, peace in the Middle East cannot be founded upon a conventional balance of military forces such as prevailed between the Eastern and Western camps during the Cold War. The enormous arsenals of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear warheads, that were in the hands of the superpowers at the time, created a climate of mutual terror that precluded attack, since the result would have been the mutual destruction of both sides. For Israel, however, peace in the Middle East has to be grounded on a balance of terror, the product of Israel's regional monopoly on nuclear arms. Israel seeks to retain its monopoly and prevent other countries in the region from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Israel has already amassed a considerable nuclear arsenal and is under no pressure to subject it to the controls and regulations of any international treaty. The bombing of Iraq's Tammuz nuclear reactor in 1981 signifies Israel's readiness to launch offensive attacks should it suspect that any other country in the region has overstepped the bounds Israel itself sets. Moreover, should Israel itself fail to act in forcing a kind of impromptu arms control on its neighbours, then it is likely that the US will itself intervene. The destruction of Iraq's military capabilities during the Gulf War was certainly intended as a warning to Iran.

The shift in Israel's outlook is reflected in the five year plan the government has drawn up for its military establishment. The area that Israeli leaders consider to comprise their strategic interests is extensive. It extends far beyond the countries that border it to include the whole of the eastern Arab world, Iran, Pakistan, North Africa, and even Zimbabwe. A security zone of this magnitude can only be covered by a sizeable arsenal of medium and long range missiles and delivery systems.

In the face of this orientation in Israeli strategic thinking, Arab countries have independently sought to develop arsenals of deterrent weaponry that would enable them to safeguard their borders and strategic depth. They have been able to obtain a range of advanced missiles, with the recent on-going armistice giving them an authority in setting their own policies in line with their various national interests.

That these objectives conflict with American-Israeli regional interests was made manifest in the wake of the Arab



Ballistic Missiles in the Middle East

Country	Missiles Systems	Producer Countries	Range (km)	Payload (kg)
Egypt	Scud - B	Soviet Union	300	1,000
	Frog - 7	Soviet Union	70	450
	Scud - B	Egypt	80	200
	Scud - B (Modified)	North Korea	305	1,000
Iraq	Scud - B	Soviet Union	300	1,000
	Frog - 7	Soviet Union	70	450
	Albana	Iraq	640	350-135
	Taqqana - 1	Iraq	900	350-135
Iran	Scud - B (Modified)	North Korea	305	1,000
	Iran - 130	Iran	200	NA
	Ogah	Iran	40	NA
Syria	Scud - B	Soviet Union	300	1,000
	Frog - 7	Soviet Union	70	450
	S.S. - 21	Soviet Union	120	450
	Scud - B (Modified)	North Korea	305	1,000
Israel	Lance	US	110	225
	Jericho - 1	Israel - France	450	680-450
	Jericho - 2	Israel	1,650-1,450	454
	Jericho - 3	Israel	2,400	NA
	Mar - 350	Israel	90	335
Libya	Scud - B	Soviet Union	300	1,000
	Frog - 7	Soviet Union	70	450
Saudi Arabia	C.S.S. 2	China	2,700	2,000
Kuwait	Frog - 7	Soviet Union	70	450
Yemen	Scud - B	Soviet Union	300	1,000
	Frog - 7	Soviet Union	70	450
India	S.S. - 21	Soviet Union	120	450
	Agni	India	2,500	1,000
Pakistan	Fakhr	India	250	1,000
	Haft - 1	Pakistan	60	500
Afghanistan	Haft - 2	Pakistan	300	500
	Scud - B	Soviet Union	300	1,000

Missiles under development

Source: Arab National Security Equation in the 21st century - Egyptian Armed Forces Strategic Studies Centre

summit meeting in Cairo. Israel and the US criticised Egypt over the purchase of Scud components from North Korea in a media campaign that most analysts have described as provocative.

According to Major General Kamal Shadid, an Egyptian military expert, there is nothing new in this seemingly sudden interest in missiles. During its war with Iran (1980-88) Iraq sought to upgrade the range of its missiles to 200km, exciting a similar interest. It is simply that with the shift in the strategic situation in the region following the election of an extreme right-wing Likud government in Israel the file has once again been reopened.

The issue is not, says Shadid, primarily one of numbers. It is not a question of the number of missiles possessed by Arab countries, nor even where these missiles originate. Suppliers are easy to come by, and include the countries of the Russian Commonwealth, China and North Korea. Nor is the range of the missiles of central concern. According to Shadid the core of the problem lies in the lack of precision of the technology. These missiles, he says, can frequently land anywhere from 100 to 400 metres off target. Yet their destructive capacity is still less, even granted this margin of error, than that of F-16 or Mirage 2000 bombers which can carry a payload of 5.5 tons of explosives over a range of 1,400km.

The aggregate arsenal of missiles and fighter bombers in the region reflects, Shadid argues, the mutual strike capacity of all the countries in the region. Hypothetically, if a country

in the region contemplated engaging in missile warfare with its neighbours, it would have to calculate the risk of simultaneous retaliation from a majority of countries in the region, nullifying any deterrent or first-strike advantages it might have. Furthermore, he argues, missiles cannot readily be converted from defensive to offensive weaponry. Missiles per se do not lead to the capture of territory. Rather, offensive warfare involves both the capacity to destroy the forces of an enemy and the ability to capture and hold on to a certain portion of his territory. Ultimately, this requires ground forces.

The international climate, Shadid maintains, is entirely inimical to missile warfare or other military conflagration in the Middle East and in the world's other hot spots. The most tangible evidence of this is the eagerness of the international community to usher in a new world order that gives precedence to economic growth and the political stability needed to engender such growth. This new spirit has been showcased in the Florence summit meeting of the European Union, the G7 summit in Lyon, the Cairo Arab Summit meeting and the African summit meeting in Yaounde, Cameroun.

"I do not believe that the Arabs' possession of these missiles is the source of the tension. Egypt has had Scud missiles for a long time. It is well known that during the 1973 October War Israel refrained from striking deep into Egypt because it knew that Egypt would retaliate by striking Tel Aviv. The only reason the issue is being raised today is because

Tehran's armament schemes have been the subject of severe international and regional censure. Combined with Iranian support for Islamic opposition groups in Egypt, Bahrain and Algeria and its attempts to destabilise a number of Middle Eastern countries, together with its support for Hizbullah in southern Lebanon, it would come as no surprise should the US attempt to create the political climate and strategic pretexts to justify a military strike against Iran.

Iraq, which prior to the Gulf War possessed the second largest missile arsenal in the region after Israel, found its air defence capabilities seriously depleted following the imposition of international sanctions. Observers believe, however, that Iraq possesses the necessary expertise in arms production to regenerate its missile capacity.

On the borders of the Middle East lie Pakistan and India, both vying to amass a missile arsenal and each threatening the other with nuclear destruction. India produces its own brand of missiles — the Agni — with a range of 2,500 km, and the Prithvi with a range of 250 km. Both are equipped to carry nuclear warheads. Pakistan also manufactures two models, the Haft-1 (80 km) and the Haft-2 (300 km) in addition to possessing Chinese made M-11 medium range missiles. The on-going tension between India and Pakistan over Kashmir could easily spark a conflagration between these two countries. So far international efforts to defuse the situation have been to no avail, with both countries continuing to refuse to sign international agreements pertaining to chemical, nuclear or missile armaments.

Egypt's role conflicts with Israeli and American interests," says Major General Zakariya Hussein, former director of the Nasser Military Academy.

One should note here that in 1973 Egyptian intelligence had information suggesting that Israel at the time possessed at least three atomic bombs, an estimate that Time magazine was later to upgrade to 13.

Major General Ahmed Abdel-Halim, strategic expert in the Middle East Research Centre, suggests several reasons why the Americans have raised the missiles issue at this time and encouraged Israel in its campaign against Egypt. Firstly, he says, the peace process has begun to touch upon very sensitive and crucial issues — final settlement for the Palestinians, the Golan Heights and the Lebanese border zone — and as a consequence Washington is keen to restrict the Arab's room for manoeuvre. Both Israel and the US were also taken by surprise by the Arab summit in Cairo. The unanimity exhibited at the summit called into question the viability of relying in the future on policies aimed at fragmenting the Arab nation and incorporating them within a Middle East regional order.

Major General Abdel-Halim rejects any suggestion that Egypt's desire for military balance is motivated by a clear-cut campaign against specific parties.

"We are treating these security issues openly and above board. We have been frank and sincere in our attempts to alert the world that both regional stability and the peace process will be threatened in the absence of political and strategic parity. If the current imbalance continues, peace will not last. At best it will be a temporary truce, which is not an acceptable or reasonable solution for Egypt. There are instruments for peace and there are instruments for war. The root of the current problem lies in the fact that Israel is attempting to use the instruments for war in order to establish peace."

Military-strategic expert Major General Talat Musallam offers another reason for the current commotion over missiles. For Egypt and other Arab countries seeking to redress the current military imbalance, the primary advantage of missiles is that they can offset the superiority of Israel's air force. This superiority makes penetration of Israeli airspace by Egyptian and Arab warplanes too costly. But missiles can accomplish this task. He adds, however, that the Arabs still have a long way to go in order to redress the current imbalance.

Israel's present strategy does not rely on its arsenal of conventional and nuclear weapons alone. It is attempting to surround the Arab world through a string of agreements and bilateral arrangements, with Turkey in the north, Ethiopia and Eritrea in the south as well as with the US, Russia, Jordan and the UK. Many of these agreements involve arms development schemes, the majority of which are aimed at enhancing Israel's air and missile technology. Others concern joint training and naval manoeuvres and the use of airspace and bases. While such agreements might not appear extraordinary in normal circumstances, they have grave implications for the Middle East, not least because, through its pacts with Jordan and Turkey, Israel has managed to secure front-line access to Iraq and Iran.

The possibility that Israel might use these agreements to pursue its strategic objectives has galvanised many countries in the region into upgrading their missile technology. This falls neatly into line with the regional aspirations of certain countries such as Iran and Iraq. Indeed, before and during the Iran-Iraq war, Iran had already accumulated a sizeable arsenal of modified Scud missiles with a range of 305km, which constitute a permanent threat to the countries of the Gulf. It has also begun to manufacture missiles domestically — the Iran 130 missile with a range of 200km and the tactical Ogah missile with a range of 40km. Recent rumours also suggest that Iran is seeking to purchase Rodong-1 missiles from North Korea which have a range of 1,000km.

Jakarta afire

Indonesian President Suharto scents the reddest blood since he overthrew Sukarno in 1966 to crush a communist uprising. Is he still chasing their shadows, asks Gamal Nkrumah

On 27 July, Indonesia inadvertently offered Third World countries a lesson. Those in the South looking for a clear strategic direction in development had to pause a little. Indonesia, the Muslim world's largest nation with some 200 million people, was enjoying rapid economic growth — averaging seven per cent a year over the past two decades — and the time had clearly come for Indonesians to put the flesh on the bones.

The people want to enjoy the fruits of their labour. That was opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri's message when I met her last September. Little did I suspect that, barely a year later, I would see her name splashed all over the international headlines. She did not strike me as a woman who would be easily cowed and fall into line with the Indonesian government's directives. She did, however, come across as being very cautious and calculating.

Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of Indonesia's first president, Ahmed Sukarno, is the leader of Indonesia's main opposition party, the centre-left Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), not only because she is a moderate in the Indonesian context, but essentially because she is her father's daughter. It was Megawati's father, Sukarno, who coined the term "guided democracy" for the Indonesian brand of democracy as distinct from Western democratic practice. Suharto, Sukarno's successor, is a great believer in Indonesia's "guided democracy". Megawati is emphatic that "we want to have a government that will implement the constitution which our founding fathers gave us. It gives the people democratic rights and free speech within the framework of the Indonesian cultural context."

As I was ushered into her sitting room, melodramatic Sumatran music was thumping out — Megawati's late mother, Fatmawati, was Sumatran. Seconds after my arrival, solemn Qur'anic recitals filled the air. Sukarnoputri is far from being a leftist; like her late father, she is a nationalist who espouses a brand of very watered-down socialism. When I met her at her party headquarters she was hesitant to call herself a socialist. She favoured a mixed economy and was for free enterprise. "But we must make sure that there is a trickle-down effect in Indonesia's new-found wealth. The gap between rich and poor is widening," warned Megawati in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The gap between rich and poor, rural poverty and urban prosperity must be bridged for us to have political stability. Many people feel

excluded from the spoils of the nation's new-found wealth."

On first impression, Megawati does not look particularly like the sort of person of which history and heroes are made. President Suharto banned the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in 1965 because it was allegedly involved in a coup attempt. The PKI, with over two million members, was in the mid-1960s the world's third largest communist party after the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party. The ghost of Indonesia's now defunct Communist Party has come to haunt Suharto. But who are his current foes — real and imaginary?

Suharto indicated recently that the PDI is "synonymous" with the banned Indonesian Communist Party of yesteryear. In the past few weeks, the world has witnessed how swiftly he deals with "troublemakers". He was certainly under no compulsion to act as if he was on the battlefield; there were a couple of hundred Megawati supporters demonstrating. In scenes reminiscent of China's Tiananmen Square, Suharto on 27 July clamped down on his opponents as hard as he did 30 years ago. Half a million Indonesians, mostly alleged communists, lost their lives in the blood baths that followed the communist witch-hunts of the mid-1960s. Like shadowy characters in classical Javanese puppet theatre, the communists were chased about, ruthlessly dealt with and systematically eliminated.

Many in the West, and in Indonesia, believe that for the macro-economic stability of Indonesia to be maintained, the political stability — authoritarian as it may be — provided by Suharto must continue. They fear Megawati, not because she is a threat to the free market mechanisms, but rather that she might not be able to contain rising expectations of her compatriots. But then why must the masses' growing aspirations be curtailed? Labour costs are still far lower in Indonesia than elsewhere in South East Asia. Land shortage for Indonesia's 100 million peasants and poor working conditions in both rural and urban areas remain the country's two most pressing problems.

Many problems, though, have been alleviated under Suharto. Adult literacy has been slashed — from 61 per cent in 1960 to 17 per cent in 1993. Infant mortality, too, was brought down from 139 per 1,000 live births in 1960 to 56 per 1,000 in 1993. In 1960, there were 46,780 persons per medical doctor in Indonesia. Three decades later, there were 9,410. The problem is that the doctors are not equally distributed across the 13,667 islands of the Indonesian archipelago. Most doctors are concentrated in Jakarta and other major



Indonesian opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri (left) with her lawyer Robert Tambunan briefs the media in Jakarta (photo: AFP)

cities. Outlying islands like Irian Jaya, Sumbawa and Flores have very few.

There have been tell-tale warning signs of public discontent. "Medical care is prohibitively expensive in Indonesia," explained an Indonesian friend in Jakarta during my last trip there. He held three different jobs and had four kids. Opposition forces are gaining momentum. But they are still no major threat to Suharto. The PDI got 15 per cent of the Indonesian electoral vote in 1993. Another of Suharto's foes is the militant leftist Democratic People's Party (PRD) led by Budiman Sudjatmiko, a 27-year-old fiery orator. The

PRD was established in 1994, a year after Megawati became PDI chairman. The PRD, not the PDI, has been blamed in the past couple of years for anti-government protests and labour strikes.

Many people committed to the newly acquired economic prosperity and stability in the country fear that Megawati's stepping into high office may be highly destabilising. I did not think so as I watched her toffee-coloured Pekinese wag its tail excitedly in greeting and adopt a somewhat swashbuckling stance as his mistress stepped out of her dark olive Mitsubishi Galant and into the plush living room of

her elegant villa off the comfortably suburban street, Jalan Keagusan.

Megawati Sukarnoputri is no Aung San Suu Kyi. Burma's Suu Kyi's coalition wrested 95 per cent of the popular vote in a landslide general election victory in 1990. Indonesia is no Burma either. Suu Kyi is a daughter of a veteran anti-colonial Burmese leader, Aung San of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League. But Burma had no Suharto to perform economic miracles. Under successive military juntas over the past four decades, it has been rather difficult to be upbeat about Burma's economy. Indonesia's Suharto, on the other

hand, laid the foundations of the country's emerging markets.

Today, Megawati reckons that she can outstep the legal and regulatory framework for competitive markets in Indonesia. Married to one of the country's leading businessmen, Mohamed Taufiq Kiemas, Megawati wants to institute an American-style anti-corrupt practices act and legal guarantees for local and foreign entrepreneurs.

"We do not support political violence or the show of force to settle political scores," she has no plans to overthrow the Suharto government," Megawati stressed during the interview with the *Weekly*. Megawati emphasised that the PDI upholds the rule of law in their struggle to accelerate the democratic process in Indonesia.

Last Friday Megawati was summoned and questioned for six hours by the police after her dismissal as PDI chairman had sparked off riots in Jakarta a few days before. She protested that Suryadi, the chairman of the government-supported PDI faction that removed her from the party's chairmanship two weeks ago, was not summoned. Sudjatmiko was identified as the prime instigator of the violence, but Megawati said that she had never heard of the PRD leader before the events. "I did not know who Budiman Sudjatmiko was," she claimed. Megawati is filing a lawsuit challenging her dismissal as PDI chief.

If Suharto has a mission for the millennium, it is that nobody will kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. Foreign investment in Indonesia was a staggering \$4.5 billion in 1995. Few developing countries could boast such a seal of approval from international investors. Indonesia will need foreign capital for the foreseeable future for investment and rapid economic growth.

What I do not believe the 27 July protests prove is that Indonesia is on the edge of a precipice. Yes, the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation head, Bambang Widjojo, is under police investigation. Police have interrogated Ridwan Saidi, the head of the Indonesian People's Assembly, a coalition of 30 political groups including the PRD. The Indonesian authorities are the first to admit that in the past they have behaved with reckless brutality in Timor and elsewhere in the archipelago. But Indonesia's Human Rights Commission is vigorous and vociferous. Megawati Sukarnoputri brushed aside any suggestion of incurring the wrath of the Badami-Intelligence Abri — Indonesia's much dreaded military intelligence agency. "I do know that democracy will triumph in Indonesia because it is something that the people want," she said.

'The mountain told us to take up arms'

The Zapatistas of Mexico organised an international meeting in a secret venue in the highland jungles of southeast Mexico last week to demonstrate against unrestrained economic liberalisation, writes Faiza Rady

"The Zapatistas of Mexico invite to an international meeting all those who refuse to submit to the blind and destructive forces that economic globalisation unleashes against human beings, their dignity, their culture and their world."

More than 4,000 people, representing 40 countries, heeded the Zapatistas' call and attended the week-long International Meeting Against Neo-liberalism and For Humanity, held between 27 July and 3 August, in Oventic, one of the Zapatista highland jungle camps, in the Lacandon forest in Chiapas state, Mexico. The meeting brought together a wide range of representatives, including native people, leftists, political personalities and artists.

Danielle Mitterrand, the widow of former French President François Mitterrand, attended on behalf of the human rights group France Liberté. "I am very interested in the way the Zapatistas are struggling to open up a space for the civil resistance of populations who are tired of the neo-liberal system that predominates in the world," commented Mitterrand.

Prominent French sociologist Alain Touraine said that the Zapatista struggle was characteristic of nascent Latin American working class movements, striving to open up the political system. "The Zapatistas provide the only serious alternative position to [neo-liberalism]. They represent the interests of the native American population and aim to include them in the economic and political process," explained Touraine. Similarly, Annie Marwan, the French translator of Nobel Prize-winning novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez for *Le Seuil* publishers, believes that "unless we agree to let half of humanity either starve or die a violent death, we have to look for alternatives that take into account the reality of the South".

At the meeting, hundreds of masked native militants welcomed the visiting delegates, after a thorough bag search for liquor, which is totally banned in Zapatista-held territory, reported *Le Monde*. Tired of their men's alcoholism and related violence, the women have imposed and maintained a strict alcohol ban in their communities. The villagers are very poor; many of the emaciated women and children go barefoot. This southeastern province of Mexico is the second poorest in the country. In effect, half of the Mexican population suffers from malnutrition, with the heaviest concentration in the rural areas where malnutrition reaches 90 per cent. Yet the Chiapas women maintain a proud posture as they sell arts and crafts products from their cooperative named Women for Dignity. "Here in the highlands we lived our own death," said Ana Maria, a *comandante* in the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). "Our lives were worth less than the machines and the animals... In this neo-liberal world, we were worthless because we bought nothing and sold nothing." And with a clear reference to native mythology, the *comandante* added: "The mountain told us to take up arms, to have a voice, to preserve our past and gain our future."

To gain a future for the marginalised native people of Chiapas, the EZLN took up arms against the government on 1 January 1994. On that day the Mexican, Canadian and American governments signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), paving the way for unrestrained economic liberalisation. In the 1980s, the Carlos Salinas administration had started to embark on a neo-liberal course with disastrous consequences for the economy. Following World Bank and International Monetary Fund directives, then President Salinas privatised major industries and rolled back state services.

While the government controlled some 1,500 public enterprises in '82, it currently only retains about 100 companies. As a result of the wholesale dumping of the public sector, 10 major financial monopolies emerged which control 71 per cent of the stock mar-

ket shares. "By selling the nation's patrimony to a handful of wealthy families, the government has created a dangerous rupture of the social fabric," wrote Jaime Avilés, editor-in-chief of the daily *La Jornada*. This is because 10 per cent of the population controls 70 per cent of the national revenue, while 90 per cent share the rest. Among the 37 million employable people, 21.5 million are either unemployed or underemployed and half of the workforce make less than the minimum wage.

It has been estimated that between '88 and '94 the stock market attracted \$100 billion of purely speculative foreign capital, which was over productively invested in the economy or used to create a single job. And when investor nervousness caused the peso to crash in December '94, the state lost most of the capital assets it had gained from the public sector sale because of massive capital flight. As a direct result of the market crash, thousands of businesses went bankrupt and some 800,000 people lost their jobs.

Meanwhile, much of the new capital has been invested in the narcotics business. The *New York Times* reported that as much \$7 billion of the national revenue may come from drug trafficking, with established links to the ruling political and military establishments. A case in point: in 1988, the American Drug Enforcement Administration issued warrants for the arrest of Manuel Bartlett Diaz, minister of interior under former President Miguel De la Madrid, Juan Arvelo Gardoqui, former minister of defence, and Enrique Alvarez del Castillo, former governor of the state of Jalisco. Like in Colombia, much of the neo-liberal "free market" entrepreneurship has translated into the ruling elite's scramble for quick and easy narco-dollars.

In impoverished rural areas like Chiapas, land privatisation programmes imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, favouring the development of agribusinesses' export production, have driven small farmers off their land. Unable to compete with the heavily subsidised cash crop monocultures, they joined the swelling ranks of the unemployed.

In 1992, as part of its privatisation drive, the government amended the native people's constitutionally guaranteed communal land concession rights — the *ejido*. The native people were thereby effectively dispossessed and, two years later, Chiapas took up arms. Demanding the right to Zapatista land, an end to the austerity programme and the extension of basic services to native peasants, the EZLN seized and held the province's major towns. Apparently outmanoeuvred and fearing escalation of this regional uprising into a full-blown civil war, Salinas declared a ceasefire after 17 days of fighting and 145 deaths. But when the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party engaged in flagrant vote rigging last year, the Zapatistas took up arms again and President Ernesto Zedillo sent 60,000 troops to Chiapas to "wipe out" the rebels.

Although the soldiers stayed away from the Meeting Against Neo-liberalism, their presence was felt. For the opening days of the meeting the charismatic EZLN leader, Subcomandante Marcos, had to remain at the distant Realidad camp — a four-hour drive from Oventic — for security reasons. "The region remains extremely tense, with thousands of rebels holed up in the forests near Mexico's borders with Guatemala," reported the AFP news agency. Yet the international character of the meeting and the presence of political personalities prevented the army's intervention. Energised by the international solidarity of the progressive movement, Marcos concluded the meeting on a hopeful note: "We will establish a network that will bring together all our struggles and all our resistance."



Burundi defies sanctions

THE NEWLY installed Burundian Prime Minister Pascal-Firmin Ndimira announced this week that he is confident sanctions against the military government of the East African country will be lifted, "if those who imposed them realise the coup was in the interest of peace". Neighbouring countries clamped sanctions on Burundi in a bid to force the military rulers of the country to return to civilian rule.

East African leaders decided to impose the sanctions during a summit in Arusha, Tanzania, on 31 July, in protest at the military coup which put former President Pierre Buyoya back in power on 25 July.

Sanctions by Tanzania and Kenya will have the most impact because about 80 per cent of landlocked Burundi's imports and exports move through Tanzanian and Kenyan Indian Ocean ports. Ndimira promised there would be no shortages of foodstuffs and basic commodities in the coming months as a result of the sanctions because the government would "take care of people".

More than 23,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees have left Burundi to return to Rwanda since the beginning of the month. They feared that if they did not return to their own country they would be exposed to reprisals from the new Tutsi-dominated Burundian authorities. Above, a Rwandan refugee mother holds her new-born baby at a transit centre in Butare, Rwanda. She is returning home from a camp in Burundi. (photo: AFP)

Nuclear conundrum

So what is different about the closed-door nuclear test ban talks that began on Monday in Geneva, wonders Gamal Nkrumah

The five acknowledged nuclear powers — the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China — must not keep replenishing their nuclear arsenals and "making the entire Nuclear Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) a total farce," warned India's new Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral this week. The five declared nuclear powers, plus India, Pakistan and Israel — three countries suspected of having a nuclear capability — have to sign the CTBT before it can go into force. India threatened this week to use its veto to block the treaty.

French Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette has dispatched urgent messages urging six key Third World countries — Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Sri Lanka, — to back the CTBT. But India, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and other Third World nations have raised objections about the CTBT. The most pivotal Third World player, India, reaffirmed its policy of rejecting the treaty banning nuclear tests unless all countries agree to a timetable for dismantling their own nuclear weapons. The five nuclear-weapon states must be included, India insisted.

China had objections over on-site inspections. It opposed the draft treaty, which it felt opened China, and other Third World countries, to abuse by the technologically advanced nations of the North — and the US in particular — since the latter have superior surveillance techniques. China feared that the entire South could face the current humiliating Iraqi predicament of having its suspect installations inspected. Frankly speaking, China, like India and Pakistan, is worried about its national surveillance data falling into Western hands.

Indian Ambassador to Egypt Karwal Sibai did not mince his words. "By definition a CTBT means no test of any kind. But the nuclear-weapon powers do not want such a treaty. They want one which will allow them to conduct tests in laboratories for which they have developed the required technological expertise. They say they need this testing for ensuring the safety and reliability of their nuclear arsenals. Through the mechanism of CTBT, as in the case of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), nuclear-weapon powers want to retain their monopoly over nuclear weapons permanently and deny any nuclear option to the rest of the world. Why should such an unequal bargain be accepted?" he said in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

The CTBT must be linked to some programme that ultimately bans all nuclear weapons everywhere. "The nuclear-weapon states can't maintain their existing weapon laboratories intact, set up new ones worth billions of dollars, keep open their nuclear testing sites, assert that their nuclear arsenals are essential for deterrence, develop new military counter-proliferation strategies against future threats from so-called 'rogue states' and terrorists, plead before the International Court of Justice that the use of nuclear weapons is legal and legitimate, and yet affirm that they are working for a genuine CTBT in order to promote nuclear disarmament," Sibai said.

Why have Western powers banned chemical weapons? "The reason is that poor countries can develop chemical weapons," the Ambassador Sibai explained. "If nuclear-weapon states want no other state to develop nuclear-weapon capacity then they must give up their own nuclear weapons within a reasonable time frame. Vague statements about elimination of nuclear weapons will no longer do. We know by experience what such statements mean. Under Article Six of the NPT, the nuclear-weapon states promised to take measures in good faith towards nuclear disarmament. But the irony is that in 1968 [when the NPT was signed] they had only 7,000 weapons amongst them and today they have 40,000. So much for their good faith," Sibai said.

"In May last year, the five nuclear-weapon states promised to exercise 'utmost restraint' in nuclear matters as part of the agreement to extend the NPT indefinitely and unconditionally. Within 48 hours, one country started blasting nuclear bombs and another country followed suit to secure the future security of its children. On the very day 61 members of the Disarmament Conference convened at Geneva to discuss the test ban treaty, they were greeted by a nuclear blast by one of the five nuclear states. So much for 'utmost restraint'. That's why our foreign minister has described the CTBT exercise at Geneva as a charade. This is not a CTBT that India will be prepared to sign. Nor should others," he added.

Yeltsin's bedside jokes

Chechen warriors were giving Russian troops a good hiding even as Russian President Boris Yeltsin was being inaugurated, writes **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow

In the presence of some 600 distinguished guests from Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) — the nations of the former Soviet Union — Boris Yeltsin was inaugurated for the second time as Russian president on 9 August. The participation of all the CIS presidents in the inauguration was due to the fact that Yeltsin had also been re-elected as president of the CIS for another year. Moreover, it was a gesture of support for the Russian president and an acknowledgment that Russia still holds sway in the CIS.

Some of the CIS presidents are toying with the idea of re-integrating their newly independent nations with Russia. Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, whose influence in the Kremlin is strong, is very keen on the idea. Primakov recently became the fourth member of the Russian National Security Council after Yeltsin, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Yeltsin's new staff appointee, Aleksandr Lebed, the president's security adviser and the powerful council's secretary.

Some observers expect that Yeltsin's inauguration will ensure political stability in Russia. Others suspect that this will not be the case due to Yeltsin's fast deteriorating health. Yeltsin has been very ill since last June and he rarely appears in public. Anatoly Chubais, Yeltsin's office manager in the Kremlin, says that Yeltsin needs two months' recuperation from heart failure and nervous exhaustion. Yeltsin's staff try to justify his hospital-

isation by saying that he was overworked during the election campaign. The important thing is that Yeltsin transformed the hospital in Barvikha into a state residence as many men of state came to consult with him about the problems facing the country. In other words, his bed in Barvikha, instead of his desk in the Kremlin, became his office.

Rivalry among Yeltsin's competing possible successors is getting out of hand. It is said that the relationship between the ambitious Chubais and the charismatic Lebed is shaky and might reach breaking point at any moment. Lebed believes that Russia must not be hasty in implementing economic reform without studying its social effects. Yeltsin gave in to Lebed's pressure to make the economy a Russian national security issue.

The relationship between Chernomyrdin and Lebed is equally tense. It is the reason why Lebed postponed a planned visit to Chechnya. Lebed has repeatedly asked for an increase in his powers to combat crime and corruption while Chernomyrdin has insisted that he will not give up any of his powers to anyone. Meanwhile, Yeltsin, from his sick bed, demands absolute loyalty from all the top officials and deliberately leaves them vying with each other for more powers. The conflicts between his possible successors are kept going as some kind of national entertainment. It all looks like a very sick joke.

Yeltsin's probable demise in the next few months looms large over Russia.

Medical reports say that he hasn't got long to go. The president has suffered two major heart attacks and continues to drink heavily. Western doctors say that he desperately needs heart bypass surgery. This may explain why Chubais asked Yeltsin to take a vacation for two months. If Yeltsin is absent for long from the political arena, then Chernomyrdin automatically becomes the sole controller of the affairs of the state. Chubais is hated by the Russian public, but he is trying his best to win the approval of officials and bureaucrats. Chubais is also wooing bankers and those who want to privatise the public sector, including some prominent Russian Jews who have close ties with Israel.

Chubais makes good use of his high public office. American Vice-President Al Gore is the only foreigner to have met Yeltsin in Barvikha. Gore persuaded Yeltsin in the hospital to promote Chubais and to give him a powerful position in the Russian ruling establishment.

It was expected that Yeltsin and his guests would listen to the oes song especially composed to gratify him on the eve of his inauguration. But Chubais hastened to cancel the song so as to avoid public ridicule at a time when millions of mine workers have been unable to get their salaries for many months. Meanwhile, Kremlin bells pealed and a 30-gun salute was fired as Patriarch Alexei II, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, blessed Yeltsin.

Today, Russia has 60 million pen-

sioners in a population of less than 150 million. State pensions range from 95,000 to 300,000 rubles a year, while the minimum food required for the period costs 1.3 million rubles. There are about 8.5 million disabled Russians and some three million abandoned children. Garbage collectors find abandoned new-born infants in rubbish bins daily. Prisoners die of tuberculosis and other diseases. Thousands of mine workers continue to strike because Yeltsin's government has not paid them in the past six months. Meanwhile, the Russian people are subjected to the terror of the mafias who now control the black market and much of the state-run and privatised economy. The mafia terrorises innocent civilians and Lebed, in particular, has spoken out against it.

Yeltsin's pre-election promises have disappeared and the hopes of the ordinary Russian people who voted for him and General Lebed have been dashed. Yeltsin won the votes of 38 million Russians — out of an electorate of 108 million. It is against this background of rapidly deteriorating economic and social conditions that the 'war in Chechnya' is intensifying. General Konstantin Pulikovskii, the Russian commander for the North Caucasus region, has been given the green light by Moscow to destroy everything that lies within his path of blood in the breakaway Republic of Chechnya. A correspondent for a Russian paper filed a report from the war zone saying that Russian claims of victory over the Chechens were "worse than lies".

Clinton talk

By James Zogby

On 6 August I had the privilege to lead a delegation of Arab American leaders to a meeting with United States President Bill Clinton and officials of the National Security Council (NSC) in the Roosevelt Room of the White House.

Our discussion with the president was preceded by a longer exchange between our delegation and Samuel Berger, deputy assistant to the president for National Security Affairs, and Mark Parris, special assistant to the president and director of the NSC's office for Near East and South Asian Affairs. The president then joined the meeting for the next 30 minutes.

While the entire session was "off the record" and, therefore, precludes the use of direct quotes, at a press conference attended by 21 of the 25 Arab American participants following the meeting, we unanimously agreed that the president was open and sincere in his comments and we were at once impressed by the depth of his understanding of our concerns and pleased by his commitment to work with our community.

During the 90-minute meeting, we raised several issues, including: — our concern for the future of the peace process in the wake of the election of Binyamin Netanyahu — especially emphasising our concerns over the possibility of new settlement and road construction, Israeli policies in Jerusalem and the deepening hardships endured by Palestinians as a result of the continuing economic blockade of the West Bank and Gaza.

— our deep and continuing hurt over the failure of the administration to respond adequately to the suffering experienced by the people of Lebanon during the Israeli assault in April, and our concern that Israel was attempting to use Lebanon as a bargaining chip in the negotiating process.

— our concern with the delay in reaching an agreement to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 986 — which allows Iraq to sell limited oil in exchange for food and medical supplies — and the continuing hardship of the people of Iraq. We made clear that we did not want to see the regime of President Saddam Hussein benefit from the situation, but we hoped that assistance could be forthcoming to the innocent people of that country.

— our concern that anti-terrorism legislation might be used to unfairly target law-abiding members of the Arab American and American Muslim communities.

— our concern with the growing anti-immigrant sentiment in the Congress reflected in both the recently passed welfare reform legislation and currently debated immigration reform bill. Both could have a negative impact by denying social service benefits to legal immigrants to the United States.

Following a detailed and thoughtful discussion, we left the meeting assured that the administration understood these concerns and confident that they were working to resolve them.

This meeting was part of a continuing dialogue that this administration has had with Arab Americans. This dialogue has included two group meetings with the president, a number of private discussions that many of us have had with the president during the past several months, meetings with the vice-president, cabinet members and the president's national security staff, and an exchange of letters between myself and the president.

While not at liberty to quote directly the comments made on 6 August by either President Clinton or Berger, I can share several observations about their responses to our concerns called from our own continuing dialogue.

The administration remains committed to the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. In no way has its policy changed as a result of the recent elections in Israel. In fact, they are working to press the Netanyahu government to move forward and to honour all the commitments that the Israeli government has made to the Palestinians in Oslo I and II.

They are following closely the internal discussions and manoeuvring taking place within the new Israeli governing coalition. While wary of extremist elements that seek to set back the peace process, they also see some positive signs in recent weeks. There is a sense that some of what the Netanyahu government is saying and doing is for domestic consumption in Israel. At the same time there are some positive statements that have been made with reference to honouring the Oslo Agreements and easing the economic hardship of the Palestinians. And even though some negative statements have been made regarding Jerusalem and settlements, these have yet to be followed up by specific negative actions.

Israel has been told on a number of occasions, both publicly and privately, that the Clinton administration views settlements as an obstacle to peace — an unhelpful impediment and possibly provocative.

With regard to Jerusalem, the administration has repeated its position that no action should be taken that would be provocative or might disrupt the peace process.

Even though this year's Democratic Party platform repeats the position taken in 1992 that "Jerusalem is the capital of the state of Israel", the White House has authorised its spokespeople to respond to questions regarding the platform by noting that while this may be the position taken by the party, the president's position remains unchanged. That position is:

"Jerusalem is one of the most sensitive and volatile issues in the peace process. I remain convinced that it is unwise for the United States to take actions that could be interpreted as prejudicing matters, such as Jerusalem, which Israel and the Palestinians themselves have formally agreed to discuss only in the context of direct, permanent-status negotiations."

At the same time, the administration continues to press for an end to the blockade of the Palestinian autonomous territories and is urging donor countries to be more forthcoming in providing needed economic assistance to the Palestinian Authority.

In a very telling comment made before a gathering of ethnic leaders who met at the White House last month, the president expressed his feeling about both the new paradigm established by the peace process and the need to provide greater help to the Arabs who have made peace. He said, "... there's a peace process going. But there are still desperate economic problems in Gaza and the West Bank. And as I've told everyone, when this peace process started three and a half years ago, the United States had an interest in the Middle East, when the Bush administration started the Madrid talks. But we had an obligation to the security of Israel. Today the United States has an interest in peace in the Middle East, an obligation to the security of Israel, and an obligation to the peace-loving Arabs who have stuck their necks out and risked their lives to try to promote the peace."

The administration has repeatedly made it clear that it is strongly committed to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. This is the first administration in many years to state publicly its commitment to UN Security Council Resolution 425 — which demands an unconditional Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon. The president did so two times in his public comments following his April meeting with Lebanese President Elias Hrawi.

The administration says that a prosperous and independent Lebanon is necessary for the prosperity and stability of the entire region. At the same time, the administration insists that there must be forward movement on both the Lebanese and Syrian tracks for the peace process to succeed.

The administration has made an effort since April to express its regrets at not having responded in a more timely and balanced manner to the suffering of the people in Lebanon during the Israeli attack.

In retrospect, it seems clear that the administration took a tactical decision regarding the Israeli elections and the future of the peace process. On a number of occasions since April when speaking with Arab Americans, the president has spoken of his shock over the loss of so many Lebanese lives. Those who participated in the 6 August discussion with the president left the meeting convinced of the administration's sincerity in this matter.

We were told that a decision with regard to implementing UN Resolution 986 was imminent, and on the next day (7 August) the US did in fact announce that it was satisfied with the monitoring provisions and would approve the oil-for-food resolution.

Our delegation thanked the president for cautioning the media and law enforcement agencies against jumping to conclusions after the TWA 800 tragedy and the Atlanta bombing. He and others in the administration have frequently reminded the nation of the unfair accusations made against Arabs and Muslims in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing and the impact that this rush to judgement had on our community.

The regular access to the White House the administration has continued to provide to Arab Americans and American Muslims has enhanced the stature of both communities and given them greater confidence to function in the US political mainstream.

The president has on a number of occasions spoken out against the growing anti-immigrant sentiment in the US. He opposed California Proposition 187. While he did agree to sign the welfare reform bill passed by Congress, he has made clear his intention to have its anti-immigrant provisions overturned in the next Congress. The president also has expressed his intention to veto the immigration bill that is currently being debated in Congress. While supporting efforts to stem the flow of illegal immigration, the administration cannot accept legislation that punishes the children of illegal immigrants by denying them education or health care.

The 6 August meeting with the president was preceded by a two-hour planning meeting that was attended by 22 of the 25 Arab American participants. At the meeting we developed our agenda of issues and forged a consensus position on how to frame our concerns. Given the diversity of the group, this was a significant development. The success of this effort gave our delegation a new sense of optimism about the future of our community and our ability to work together as a unified political force.

The 25 Arab American participants were selected by the White House Office of Public Liaison to reflect both geographic and political diversity. The Arab Americans came from 12 national organisations and 10 states. In an effort to expand the opportunity for more groups and individuals to meet the president, two-thirds of this group had not been present at earlier White House meetings.

The continuing dialogue with the president and his administration marks a new stage in the growth of the Arab American community's involvement in US political life, one which the White House appreciates and recognises. It is a development of which we are proud, and on which we are eager to build.

The writer is the president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

Camouflage or sabotage

BOB DOLE is smiling. But somewhere close to the surface, nestled uncomfortably beneath the veneer of enthusiasm emanating from the Republican presidential hopeful is a calculated measure of cautious optimism more characteristic of the experienced legislator and former Senate majority leader, writes **Tarek El-Tablawy**.

Dole has always been a negotiator and a compromiser, as he must be to hammer legislation through a Congress that, until two years ago, was dominated by Democrats. But it is also this need to appease that has cost him support, not only among the voters, but also within the Republican Party itself.

In one way or another, virtually every move he has made on the campaign trail, such as resigning from the Senate and wavering on key issues like abortion rights, which top the electorate's list of priorities, has backfired. In short, while he maintains that the Republican National Convention, which is under way in San Diego, is "where the real race begins", according to many analysts this is his last leg.

Dole aides assert that the nomination of former Bush administration housing secretary, congressman and ex-football star Jack Kemp as vice-presidential candidate is a much-needed booster shot in the arm for the 73-year-old World War II veteran and seasoned legislator. And, to an extent, this is true. Kemp's nomination has closed the Clinton-Dole gap from 22 per cent to 12 per cent. But, on the flip side, at least as far as uniting the fractious Republican Party is concerned, it has amounted to little more than Dole potentially shooting himself in the foot.

Rather than bring together the Grand Old Party, Kemp's nomination as Dole's lieutenant, coupled with the ex-Senate majority leader's vacillation on abortion rights, has raised the hopes of some key Republican players like Massachusetts Governor William Weld, New York Governor George Pataki and the bad boy of the right-wing right, Pat Buchanan. In the eyes of these key players, Kemp's moderate views on issues like abortion and immigrant rights fly in the face of party rhetoric.

And rhetoric was what it was all about when it came to drafting the GOP platform. Dole's support, at the encouragement of the right-wing Christian Coalition's Ralph Reed, of a "big tent" clause in the platform, whereby the party elite agreed to disagree, has left the presidential contender under fire from the party moderates and voters alike. Therefore, in this game of political Russian roulette, what remains to be seen is if this nomination will get Dole off to a running start, or if the race is over before it really began.



Marching detours

Last weekend Ulster's Protestants and Catholics managed to march without provoking each other: "a huge step forward", reports **Dosa El-Bey**

Confrontation between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland was averted last weekend when the two communities decided, in a gesture of goodwill, to reroute planned marches in order to avoid provoking each other. Catholic and Protestant marches were, therefore, conducted in peace and without incident in the province's two biggest cities.

Political observers had been anticipating the sort of violence which occurred last month when the Orange Order, Ulster's dominant Protestant fraternal group, refused to change the route of its march through Portadown, 40km southwest of Belfast, and thereby avoid a Catholic part of town. The ensuing hostilities seriously jeopardised the fragile peace process in Britain's poorest province.

On Saturday, some 15,000 members of the Apprentice Boys, a Protestant fraternal order, altered the route of their march in Londonderry, Ulster's second biggest city, to avoid passing through areas mostly populated by Catholics. The march, which takes place every August, is held to commemorate the town's successful defence in 1689 against forces loyal to the Catholic King James II, who

had been deposed the previous year by the Protestant British King William of Orange. The order took its name from the 13 apprentices who in 1688 shut the gates of the city in front of James II.

A Catholic challenge to this march in 1969 was what triggered the violence which marked the beginning of 25 years of virtual civil war in Northern Ireland.

Catholics similarly rerouted two marches they held on Friday in Londonderry and on Sunday in the province's capital, Belfast, away from Protestant-populated areas in the two cities.

Sunday's march marked the 25th anniversary of the introduction of the British policy of summary detention without trial of Catholics suspected of terrorist activities in the province. The policy was abolished the following year.

The timing of the Catholics' Friday march was a concession in itself. Catholics had planned to march at the same time as the Apprentice Boys on Saturday and to pass by them, in some places, at a distance of only 300 metres to demonstrate against Protestant marches going through predominantly Catholic areas. But, to the relief of the security forces, the Catholics decided to reschedule their protest.

Following the compromises made by both sides, the two communities were praised for their understanding and tolerance. The leader of the predominantly Catholic Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), John Hume, described their attitude as "totally positive" and "a lesson all parts of Northern Ireland should learn". He reiterated that dialogue is the only way forward.

Apprentice Boys leader Alistair Simpson lauded the Catholics for allowing the order to have its "civil and religious liberties". The summer marching season is considered an integral part of the heritage of the Protestants of Northern Ireland. Any change in the route of the marches is seen by the community as a serious violation of its civil rights.

Gerry Adams, leader of Sinn Féin, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army, praised the dialogue between the Catholics and Protestants and described the rerouting of the Protestants' Saturday march as "a huge step forward".



Edited by Gamal Nkrumah

Sanctioning security

The signing of a \$20 billion natural gas deal between Turkey and Iran, just one week after the US imposed sanctions against corporate investment in Iran's oil and gas sector, has raised Clinton's hackles. With the presidential elections looming in the not-so-distant future, Clinton is now faced with the difficult decision of finding a suitable response to Turkish Prime Minister Erbakan's action. His decision is made more difficult by the fact that few if any of his European and NATO allies have voiced anything but the strongest of criticisms against his unilateral sanctions.

But it is hard to imagine that Clinton could have expected anything less than having Iran's Rafsanjani throw his nose at the US. After all, efforts to isolate Iran since the 1979 revolution have had little impact on the country. In fact, much to the US's dismay, they have only helped to indirectly strengthen Saddam Hussein's tenuous hold on Iraq. Moreover, as the sanctions imposed against Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait have proven, these embargoes do more damage to the citizens of the country than to the regime itself.

The significance of Turkey's move does not lie in Erbakan's motives for signing the agreement with Iran, but with the US's rationale behind imposing the sanctions in the first place. Its European allies have repeatedly argued that its approach to combating terrorism is misdirected and inefficient. This much has been decidedly proven through the bombing of TWA flight 800 and the pipe bomb explosion during the Atlanta Olympics. Is the best way of ending such attacks, then, by embracing an economic version of Israel's security measures that include border closures, blockades and sweeping military manoeuvres against Palestinian? Tactics that Clinton has often denounced as being more likely to undermine peace than to promote security.

If he is seeking to thwart terrorism, then imposing a policy that will drive a population of a country into the ground economically will only further tarnish the US's image, not that of the regime. A more prudent policy would be to cooperate and negotiate instead of alienate and force innocent individuals to participate in an unfriendly game of realpolitik.

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A developing partnership

Egypt, increasingly attractive to foreign investors, is set to reap the benefits, writes **Ibrahim Nafie**



Some LE37 billion of private investments have been approved in the past six months and it looks increasingly likely that the investment target of LE56 billion for the current financial year will be exceeded.

The level of activity on the Egyptian stock market since last April is also encouraging. In the first six months of this year the volume of trade outstripped all expectations. Foreign investments in the stock market have exceeded even the most optimistic predictions and the gross volume of transactions last July amounted to LE30 million of which some seven per cent involved foreign investors. The Egyptian market, increasingly attractive to foreign investors, is performing better than most other developing stock markets.

In addition to seeking ways to expand the access of Egyptian exports to American markets, the Egyptian delegation also explored ways to attract foreign capital into Egypt. Up till now the increase of foreign investment can largely be ac-

counted for by the activities of international financial institutions building up portfolios. Direct industrial investment accounts for a small proportion of foreign capital entering Egypt, a situation that policy-makers are keen to rectify.

During a dinner hosted by US Vice-President Al Gore, President Mubarak outlined the many legislative amendments passed in the last six months improving the climate for foreign investors while Presidents' Council meetings revealed the depth of interest in the Egyptian economy by American investors. Some 15 actual projects, feasibility studies for which are nearing completion, were discussed, including major industrial schemes and a joint project to manufacture aluminium capitalised at between \$170-200 million, 45 per cent of which will be provided by the US. The latter project will produce 13,000 tons of aluminium products, processing the ore excavated by the Nagas Hamadi Aluminium Consortium. The project, located in Nagas Hamadi, should provide much needed job opportunities in Upper Egypt. A second important project, involving the manufacture of trailers by the Egyptian SIMAF Company using advanced American technology, should not only boost Egyptian exports but also help in developing the domestic transportation sector.

Such projects testify to increased American interest in investing in Egypt's secondary industries, and represent an improvement on earlier patterns of investment which by and large were concentrated in the petroleum sector. They are the result of increased confidence in the actual performance and the potential for growth of the Egyptian economy. They bear witness to the success of policies designed to facilitate long term economic growth, and bear out my belief that, with President Mubarak's recent visit to Washington US-Egyptian relations have entered a new and prosperous phase.

Progress and self censorship

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed questions whether the concomitance between the discovery of life on Mars and the judgement passed on Nasr Abu Zeid is more than a mere coincidence

The day after Egypt's Court of Cassation upheld the appellate judgement ordering the separation of professor Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid from his wife Dr Ibtihal Younis, scientists at the US space agency, NASA, announced that micro-fossil remains found in a Martian meteorite which landed on earth 13,000 years ago provide strong circumstantial evidence that a primitive form of life existed on the red planet 3.6 billion years ago. At first glance, the two incidents appear to be unrelated except for the seemingly coincidental factor of concomitance. However, because both have implications going beyond the here and now, because both touch on our perception of fundamental issues, it might be useful to examine them together.

Of course, the early-Martian life theory has yet to be confirmed, but if it proves true then, according to top scientists in the field, it would be one of the greatest discoveries ever. Although it is so far only a hypothesis, there is enough justification to subject it to systematic scientific investigation in order to settle the matter definitively.

In a CNN panel discussion devoted to the event, scientists were asked why the discovery had been officially announced before conclusive proof of its validity had been established. One of the panelists indignantly pointed out that science could not wait for unequivocal conclusions before making its findings public. Indeed, going public with an as yet unconfirmed theory could facilitate mobilisation of the widest spectrum of scientific disciplines capable of contributing to its confirmation — or its falsification. For, as renowned philosopher Karl Popper declared, scientific knowledge progresses through the falsification of existing theories. Unlike metaphysics, no scientific theory is immune to improvement by a superior theory.

Actually, the discovery was not a complete surprise. Martians have for long figured in the popular imagination, thanks to the works of poets, writers and artists, who dreamt that eventually they would one day visit us on earth. But these extra-terrestrial beings were imagined in the form of "little green men" or some other form of quasi-humans, as illustrated by the famous film *ET*, which impressed a whole generation of children a few years ago. The real surprise was that the life form said to have existed on Mars belonged to an ultra-Lilliputian world invisible to the naked eye. These microscopic creatures, which re-

semble bacteria on Earth, remained biologically primitive, never going beyond single-cell structures, while the complex life form that is a human being is made up of three hundred trillion cells.

The reason the discovery did not come as a complete surprise was that although the two Viking spacecraft which landed on Mars in 1976 did not discover any sign of life, the data they brought back did not exclude the possibility that life could at one time have existed on the red planet. Although the pictures they brought back showed an arid desert, all the elements necessary to sustain life, such as carbon, nitrogen, hydrogen, oxygen and phosphorus were present, in addition to water vapour and a layer of ice under the planet's crust.

We are still reluctant to accept the idea that bacteria are more resilient than humans, or indeed that they could actually outlive the human species, which is today threatened with extinction, if not by weapons of mass destruction then by genetic disorders and other diseases such as AIDS, mad cow disease, etc., which have proliferated with the growing man-made pollution of the planet. The survival capacity of bacteria, which have always exhibited an extraordinary adaptability, is graphically illustrated by their sustained existence on this planet for several billion years longer than any other more complex creatures. Before we can accept this idea, we must liberate ourselves from our Homo-centrist approach.

We now know that our sun is a very ordinary star, one of billions of similar stars in our galaxy alone. It has also been proved that other stars, in our galaxy have planets similar to those revolving around the sun. Moreover, thanks to the Hubble telescope, we now know that the number of galaxies in the universe can be counted in the billions and not, as was previously supposed, in the thousands. If scientists succeed in proving that life once existed on Mars, this would suggest the existence of life in billions of other planets and that life throughout the universe is the rule, not the exception. It would further suggest that life on each planet need not develop separately but that it could be transferred from one planet to another through meteorites like the one which reached earth from Mars — a scenario that raises the disturbing possibility that we ourselves could be Martians!

These issues raise fundamental philosophical problems touching on the human condition and the nature

of the universe. Despite the vast distances separating stars and galaxies, the universe is an indivisible whole. Whatever the intelligence, knowledge and mastery of the environment that the human species has developed, it does not follow that our planet is central to the scheme of things and that life in other worlds could not have attained frontiers far exceeding ours.

It was such philosophical concerns which informed my reply, even before the Mars discovery was made public, to a BBC correspondent's request for a comment on Abu Zeid's condemnation. I told him of my worry that the court ruling might induce Egyptian, eventually even Arab and Muslim intellectuals abroad, to impose a kind of self-censorship on themselves for fear of suffering a fate similar to that of Abu Zeid. Nor is this fear likely to disappear because of the recent amendment brought to the Code of Procedure disallowing the institution of court cases by other than parties with a direct interest. For, although the amendment was enacted before it pronounced sentence, the Court of Cassation chose to disregard it altogether.

Although the Cold War is over, the current world order is still marked by ferocious rivalry. Whoever is unable to keep up with the race is at risk of becoming so overwhelmed as to lose his very identity. The main source of power today is science and technology, which cannot be mastered in a climate where freedom of thought and imagination is restricted by self-censorship. When I expressed my fears to the BBC correspondent, I did not know that the very next day would see the announcement of a momentous scientific discovery which would turn the whole notion of 'life' on its head, by putting forward a qualitatively different vision of this phenomenon, its nature and characteristics, at the cosmic level.

As the horizons of human knowledge expand, religion can serve as a bulwark against the potentially traumatic pace of scientific progress. At the same time, religious faith should not stand in the way of our ability to absorb and interact positively with new scientific discoveries. This admittedly delicate balance can only be maintained through open debate, and it is the duty of thinkers and writers to warn of the dangers inherent in allowing either consideration to outweigh the other, thereby exposing society to ruptures, both spiritual and material, in its very fabric.

More than 15 days

By **Naguib Mahfouz**

Fresh from university, I was employed in the Ministry of Religious Endowments when Abdel-Salam El-Shazli was minister.

A martinet for discipline, he decided to reform the ministry. He issued an order to close the gate at Ram sharp every day. Anyone absent by 8 o'clock had a day out from his annual holidays. Should he be late a second time, then 15 days' pay would be deducted from his salary.

Members of the public were forbidden to enter the ministry and would be interviewed by the head of the Investigation Department at the gate. The inspector would then contact the civil servant responsible for the matter. A date would be fixed for the petitioner's return and should the civil servant not have completed any business related to the case by this date, a full 15 days' pay would be deducted.

No food was allowed into the ministry, and the reading of newspapers was banned. Anyone found eating or reading had... yes, 15 days' pay deducted.

I was parliamentary secretary to Shazli Pasha, and on one occasion had prepared a written reply for the minister to deliver to the assembly. I handed him the envelope and then sat outside the office to reread a short story of mine which I had just completed. To my horror I found that I had the text of the reply in my hands. The story was in the envelope. I rushed into Shazli Pasha's office before he entered the chamber and exchanged the two envelopes when the minister seemed distracted.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmany.

The Press This Week

Al-Ahram: "The Israeli government's decision to lift the restrictions imposed on the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and linking the resumption of talks with the Palestinians to the closure of all Palestinian offices in Jerusalem are but a test of the Arab political will. Needless to say, the two decisions are merely the implementation of Netanyahu's electoral agenda."

"What is required at this point is unified Arab action to secure international opposition to any violations of the peace accord negotiated by the Israeli government. It should be made clear that Europe and Russia will have a more active role to play during the period immediately preceding the US presidential elections."

Al-Akhbar: "The Israeli claim that their security is a top priority, which is even more important than the security of the countries of the region is sheer nonsense and will not lead to peace or stability. Although Egypt has retrieved its own land, its security and stability are closely connected with the return of all other Israeli-occupied land under UN resolutions."

Al-Ahram: "The Israeli government's decision to lift the ban on Jewish settlements reveals its heinous intentions not only to freeze the peace process temporarily but also to revive the racist Zionist agenda which aims at setting up the mythical state of Israel from the Nile to the Euphrates."

Al-Shaaba: "Since Netanyahu's visit to Washington, it appears that both the Israeli and the American parties have agreed to play word games with the Arabs in order to gain more time and to undermine Arab solidarity. It is as clear as day that the Likud government has not given up any of its objectives; for Jerusalem will remain the undivided eternal capital of Israel while Jewish settlements in both the West Bank and Gaza will be expanded. What Israel has offered so far is nothing more than its readiness to force itself to sit down with the Arabs at one table!"

Al-Gomhuriya: "The Israeli prime minister should stop manoeuvring and put an end to his ambiguous policies. Netanyahu should realise that the Arab stance towards the occupied lands and Arab rights is clear: There is a chance for peace, cooperation and ending aggression and

Word games

terrorists. Israel could either be a part of this region or remain as it has always been; a distant abhorred outsider. The decision is in Netanyahu's hand. He should realise that to achieve peace, he should give up his extremist policies and all acts of aggression."

Al-Ahram: "At a time when the American administration is launching a vicious campaign against Libya and Iraq without verifying the charges levelled against them, it turns a blind eye to the Israeli aggression in the form of seizing land which belongs to Palestinian families and the expansion of its settlement policy."

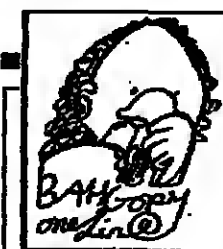
Al-Wakef: "The question which poses itself is: does the American administration have a concrete body of evidence to accuse Iran of terrorism or is it a deeply-rooted wish to settle old scores with the rulers of Iran who humiliated the Americans during the American hostage crisis in 1980?"

Al-Ahali: "The issue of Palestinian labourers who work inside Israel is a complicated one which has been given very little prominence for years. The Palestinians are working with their bare hands to build the settlements which take up most of their occupied land and threaten their future."

Al-Mussawar: "Egypt cannot turn its back on the Palestinians because it feels responsible for helping them in their struggle to obtain their rights. Neither can it isolate itself from the Syrian stance since Syria was a key partner in the October War and is an important player in the region's stability. Nor will Egypt turn a blind eye to what is going on in Lebanon."

Therefore it was only natural that Egypt and the rest of the Arab world would reject Israel's Lebanon first proposal. The Israeli premier knows very well that his proposal is only meant to drive a wedge between Syria and Lebanon. But it should be made clear that despite the differences of opinion in Syrian-Lebanese relations, the Syrian presence in Lebanon will remain a safety valve for Lebanon's unity and its national and Arab identity."

Compiled by **Omaysma Abdel-Latif**



When Osama El-Baz smiles, his mouth becomes a single line connecting cheeks and ears. The round head, topped with silver hair, appears at times to be that of a sage. The eyes, opened wide, search the horizon. They are the eyes of a seer, alert to danger, sensing, always, possible scenarios. But taken together these features add up to an optimistic visage, the face of President Mubarak's political adviser.

هكذا من الأصل

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Turkish dilemma

While Kamal El-Din Erbakan, the Turkish prime minister, was signing agreements with Iran, ignoring American warnings about dealing with Iran and Libya, other negotiations were entering their final stage, this time between Turkey and Israel. The latter negotiations revolved around the details of plans for a joint project intended to improve the performance of Turkish air force Phantom jets.

Ever since Erbakan came to power the Egyptian media has been puzzled about how to treat him. Should he be criticised as the leader of a pro-Islamic party, or should he be applauded for his diplomatic efforts in attempting to extricate Turkey from the various policy minefields that had alienated many Arab states?

Several commentators predicted that having come to power after forming a coalition government with the True Path Party led by Tansu Ciller, Erbakan would attempt to put his political platform into practice by withdrawing from NATO, forming an Islamic Alliance and freezing military agreements with Israel.

Nothing of the kind happened, of course. In today's world of *realpolitik*, policies represent more than slogans. They are decided on the basis of their effects, and in Turkey that means that other parties, the Turkish army, still a major player in Turkish politics, the US, Turkey's most powerful ally, and the European Union, its main trading partner, must be taken into account.

Recent developments in Turkish policy show that Erbakan is anything but the Imam of a mosque whose fate placed at the head of his country's government. He is an astute politician whose consciousness has been informed by half a century of political upheaval. He is well aware of the strength, both domestic and foreign, to the Islamic trend in a secular state such as Turkey.

As a result Erbakan has stuck to the same basic policies pursued by previous Turkish governments, while at the same time has attempted to smooth Turkish-Islamic and Turkish-Arab relations.

Turkey has attempted to soothe Arab fears concerning its military agreement with Israel, and has attempted to reduce tensions with Syria and Iraq. It is in this context that the natural gas deal with Iran, worth around \$20 billion over the next 20 years, should be viewed.

Turkey, on this issue at least, appears to be counting on loopholes and inconsistencies in American law and on international and European opposition to American efforts to impose penalties on foreign companies investing in Libya and Iran, to ride the tide of American annoyance.

Behind Turkish moves on the Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian fronts lies the desire to solve the Kurdish problem and to bring to an end the longstanding PKK rebellion, a war that weighs heavily on the Turkish economy. It is a problem successive Turkish governments have so far failed to solve.

Now if Erbakan does manage to solve this problem, or at the very least succeeds in creating a regional basis for cooperation in solving the problems that surround Turkey, then there would be no need for Turkey to enter into military pacts with Israel. Cooperation would also have spin-offs, and might solve the arguments over water that have soured Syrian, Iraqi and Turkish relations. All of which, of course, begs the question of just who is objecting to the Turkish-Islamic deal, and for what reasons.

Gomaa



Soapbox

Palestine in Atlanta

Since 1964, Palestine has been present at every Olympiad around the world — as an observer, not a full participant. The Palestinians presented their aspirations to the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The officials were consistently responsive and understanding, but one problem always stood in our way: the Palestinian Olympic Committee (POC) had to be based in Asia.

In 1989, friends suggested that the POC establish its headquarters in Iraq. During the Barcelona Olympics, we again presented our application for membership to the IOC. Their answer was categorical: "All your papers are in order, but you need to be based in Palestine, not in exile."

The Israeli occupation does not mitigate the fact that the land belongs to Palestine. Yet Israeli pressures prevailed upon the IOC to obstruct Palestinian membership.

After the creation of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994, we again submitted our application, and this time, despite Israel's objections, the IOC granted Palestine full membership. In Atlanta, the Palestinian delegation consisted of three contestants and 10 individuals who had fought to bring the Palestinian flag and national anthem to this occasion.

The Israeli government lodged an official protest against the display of these national emblems, but the Palestinian delegation stood its ground. The IOC supported it, on the grounds that Palestine is now a *de facto* reality and that these games are purely an arena for athletic competition, not for politics.

Our goal now is to build a strong team for Sydney. The Palestinians had a long-cherished dream: to become part of the Olympic family. This dream has come true. We will prove that our struggle for life continues.

This week's soapbox speaker is the deputy chairman of the Palestinian Olympic Committee.



Rabi Hafez Al-Turk

Time to call the spin doctor

The Israeli prime minister would do well to answer his reality call, writes Ragab El-Banna, before time runs out on him

The nature of the crisis facing Israel's prime minister is clear to any observer of Middle East affairs. The image of the hardline Netanyahu, his inflated public ego smacking of conceit and intransigence, seem to be subsiding; a more moderate prime minister peers through the brash self-confidence.

In the first weeks of his term, it was obvious that Netanyahu was confused. As a politician at the head of an opposition party, he criticised and distorted the achievements of the Peres government both at home and abroad.

As he was sworn in, Netanyahu set the tune: the Golan would not be returned to the Syrians, negotiations regarding Palestinian self-rule would not continue, and negotiations on the future of Jerusalem would not take place. These statements did not require much courage. His rejection of previous peace efforts may be attributed to his ignorance of reality, or simply his underestimation of underlying factors. For instance, sealing off the Occupied Territories and forbidding entry to Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza was a measure that paid no heed to the fact that Israel desperately needs Palestinian labour to operate its agriculture and industry. Further, the prime minister did not conceive that his belligerence could discourage foreign and domestic investments in Israel, discourage new projects or undermine the market. Financial and economic fluctuations, falling stock prices and lower production and export levels ensued — no doubt to his surprise.

It may be argued that Netanyahu lacks leadership experience. This is his first ministerial office; he may be ignorant of the full extent of the responsibilities entailed by his position. He may nurture the belief that Israel, to this day, is in a position to dictate its will and determine the course of action.

The prime minister tends to see things the way he likes, and he was a bit slow in registering the reality shock. Increasing pressures are having results, however. He is coming to terms with the facts, and this should encourage him to pursue a sound course that will serve the interests of Israel, in ensuring security and power, without denying the same to the Arabs or depriving them of their rights.

At home, Netanyahu has had to face increasing anxiety and tension. Domestic unrest is a reaction to his policy, which threatened a replay of the "no war-no peace" situation prevailing before the Madrid conference and the accords signed by Israel, the Palestinians and the United States. He found himself on the same bench as the hardliners whose political leadership was inspired by legendary figures for whom Israel alone is entitled to live while — they believe — its neighbours are destined to remain weak and vulnerable. It is incredible that Netanyahu should not be willing to live and let live, or even conceive that Syria would remain silent forever while a part of its territory is occupied and populated by Israelis rather than Syrians. Nothing can justify Netanyahu's claims regarding the Golan, Gaza or the West Bank.

The facts which the Israeli prime minister had overlooked in the past are today colossal hurdles which his policy must confront. He must address the conflicts within his own government of hawks and hardliners — a coalition he believed he could manipulate. Afraid of terrorism on the streets, he is discovering the time bombs in his own cabinet, of whom Levy, Sharon and Begin are but a few.

On the other hand, the tensions and pressures experienced by the Palestinians are bound to fuel violence. Deprived of the most basic needs — food, medicine and education — and in the absence of any hope for future improvement, a resurgence of the Intifada is possible. The fear, however, is that the new Intifada will not be restricted to throwing stones, but will draw on the newly acquired experience of Palestinians in dealing with Israeli violence. A 1996 Intifada will bring together Palestinian hardliners and extremists and will possibly be joined by more radical elements all too ready to gain the crown of martyrdom, if only to damage Israeli interests.

The present crisis will certainly shake Netanyahu out of his complacency, which swelled after his marginal victory. He will have to face reality and make decisions that, ultimately, serve the interests of his country. Peace in the Middle East will serve Israel's economic and political interests. Israel should bank on its acceptance by the Arab countries and on the lifting of the blockade. If the prime minister disturbs the new and precarious balance in the Middle East, or rekindles freshly-buried animosities, he will forfeit Arab confidence in Israel's genuine desire for peace.

Netanyahu has a short time to practice. His deadline: the US presidential elections. After that he will discover that the US, by virtue of its international responsibilities and the guarantees it has given the Arabs and Israel as a sponsor of the peace process, is committed to seeing the peace process through. If Netanyahu remains intransigent, however, the present crisis will most certainly intensify, leading to a situation of unpredictable dimensions.

The writer is the editor in chief of October magazine.

The bitter taste of victory

As the victors count the spoils, let the dialogue begin, writes El-Sayed Yassin. The future does not spell history

Winners often feel strangely like losers. This applies to intellectual politics just as it does to war.

Still, intellectual battles, particularly in times of historical transformation, have their own intrinsic character. It is naive to rely on quantitative criteria to gauge the ascent of a particular trend of political thought, as though this ascent — which may only be the product of an aberrant phase in society — heralded the ultimate victory of the trend's advocates. We must not dispense with qualitative analysis.

The most salient cultural traits of the world at present are the pervasive effects of the scientific and technological revolution; universalism in all its economic, political and cultural manifestations; the sharpening confrontation between the US, on one hand, and international polarities that began their rise in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, on the other; and, finally, intensified conflicts between positivist secularism and religious extremism. The circumstances of any country in the world, and the fate of any regime, will depend on its ability to interact positively and creatively with these changes, and on its position regarding political and cultural conflicts.

When myth and fantasy gain a foothold within a developing country, when educated people and university professors are no less credulous than the illiterate, as recent events in Egypt have shown, these are indicators of society's inability to grasp the current global cultural phase, which is founded upon science and technology.

When a government fails to draw up a well-planned social policy, drawing on its researchers' talents, designed to solve the problems of the broad masses of the population and geared towards human development, this indicates deficiency and negligence. At a time when the population faces constantly exacerbated strains, when more and more people fall below the poverty line every day, construction companies specialised in building private estates in the desert ("Choose your own palace") take out full-page advertisements in the newspapers. Millions of pounds are poured into summer resorts which will be used, at most, once a year. All this can only mean that we must contend with gross distortions.

If a regime does not revise its foreign policy and reformulate its political, economic and even technological alliances, considering new international conflict configurations, this regime is destined to fall behind. The conflict in human values between positivist secularism and religious extremism — which has been translated into random terrorism as a means of effecting social change — is the most visible arena for the cultural conflict at present. In the resolution of this conflict, for advocates of enlightenment or for those of regression, the future of society itself is at stake: the safety and security of its citizens, the knowledge that medieval methods of inquisition and terror based upon distorted interpretations of religious scriptures will never prevail, even if isolated signs suggest otherwise.

Pinpointing a few of the essential terms that are being bandied about in the current battle among intellectuals might help delineate the boundaries of the present cultural conflict in Arab society. Secularism, for instance, is the key to the establishment of civil governments, which are grounded upon a constitution formulated according to certain democratic and legal procedures, the principle of sovereignty of law and the separation of legislative, executive and judiciary authorities. Central to the concept of civil government are the guarantee of political freedom and the recognition of political plurality. These principles are embraced in the framework of laws that protect the freedom of thought and expression.

Some recent trends in political Islam, however, in their rejection of the constitutional secular state as we have described it, have tried to tarnish secularism as a term by distorting its meaning and history. They posit secularism as the antithesis of religion — a claim which obviously has nothing to do with historical reality. The ulterior aim of these politico-religious groups is to overturn the secular state, replacing it with a religious government ruled by theologians and supplanting the mechanisms of positivist legislation with that of religious fatwas (jurists' opinions). These groups maintain that they are advocates of an Islamic state, but they are given the lie by the fact that Egypt already has a civil government founded upon a constitution stipulating that the principles of Islamic law are the fundamental source of legislation. Clearly, religion and secularism are not mutually contradictory or incompatible. Secularists refuse, however, that the nation, society and culture be subjected to flawed and arbitrary interpretations of religious scripture.

To be fair, a trend of rational enlightened scholars does exist, based on the conviction that Islamic principles should constitute the primary source of law, the economy, culture and society. Some of these scholars have made important intellectual contributions, which may serve as an objective basis for dialogue.

Unfortunately, these rational voices are drowned out by the tumult of those who would subvert the intellectual and cultural life of Egyptian society. Turning current social and economic hardships to their own benefit, they use tendentious propaganda aimed at inflaming passions against the state, the government and society. Typically, they target the poor, the marginalised and the lower middle classes. But they have found sympathisers in some of the opposition newspapers, who have rallied to their support in an indirect way and have gone so far as to defend individuals guilty of brutal acts of terrorism, under the pretext of upholding human rights.

Most recently, these groups have exploited a loophole in Egyptian law, using *hisba* to prosecute writers and intellectuals. They began by suing for the confiscation of several creative intellectual works, then charged certain scholars with apostasy. The crime of the accused? Exercising their right to freedom of thought and expression. If they are guilty of any crime, a more suitable solution would be to try them in accordance with established academic norms.

Faced with deranged cries for blood, the enlightened Islamic trend, with only rare exceptions, was muted. Yet I believe that, given the critical times our country is passing through, this is the appropriate moment for the advocates of this trend to join other democratic intellectuals in forming a united front against extremism.

While I am against the exclusion of any intellectual trend willing to contribute perceptions pertaining to the government, society and culture, while I oppose the suppression of any political trend that believes in the constitution, the law and pluralistic politics and works within the framework of the law, I vehemently oppose those groups who use distorted interpretations of religious texts to legitimise their exercise of material and moral terrorism, targeting the entire population.

Enlightened Islamic thinkers should not be reluctant to condemn the misappropriation of religion to obtain certain judicial rulings. Instead, they should speak out, joining other Egyptian intellectuals in their opposition to any form of extremism, and their support for open, democratic dialogue with representatives of other intellectual and political trends. This would truly contribute to advancing the freedom of belief, the freedom of thought and respect for human rights.

Now is the time for the dialogue to begin. As for those who think they have won, they can be sure that defeat is close at hand. Egyptian society cannot regress. We aspire to the future, while their aim, impossible to achieve, is to bring back the past.

Let's get it right

Sir - I am continually appalled at the careless bias with which the Western press continues to report about international terrorism.

Relatives living abroad told me that not even one hour after TWA flight 800 exploded in the air, local California television news reporters were speculating that a bomb planted by Middle Eastern terrorists was the cause.

And after the recent bomb explosion at Centennial Park in Atlanta during the Olympics, a British newspaper wrote that FBI agents were keeping "an open mind" and refusing to rule out a possible Middle East connection in the attack.

I cannot help but conclude that this is not a problem of poor education systems or plain ignorance. Western media institutions — some, of course, not all — carelessly, or perhaps intentionally, fuel these stereotypes in order to give their stories some "meat" or controversy.

In both the incidents mentioned above, authorities proceeded with extreme cau-

tion before releasing any information about the tragedies. In the absence of details, or a "scoop", accuracy is sacrificed in order to keep the audience interested.

Propagating such stereotypes may also serve other interests too complex for the reader to recognise while reading a purported "news report" on terrorism.

Nearly a decade ago, Edward Said articulated these same concerns in his book, "Covering Islam". It should be required reading for all press hounds.

Eric Jones

Heliopolis

Chilly indoors

Sir - Can anyone explain why so many public institutions insist on turning on their air conditioning systems to such a high degree? Cairo's fancier cinemas are some of the worst offenders in this respect. Their viewing halls are often so cold that one is forced — absurdly — to resort to carrying a second layer of clothes through

the afternoon or early evening blazing heat and wearing one's winter wardrobe inside just to watch a film in some sort of comfort.

Some of the swankier shops and shopping centres in town are guilty of the same crime, but one can at least avoid these and save oneself a great deal of money at the same time. Many restaurants of the more salubrious variety are similarly to be scoffed at for their refrigerator-like interiors.

Do these institutions think that by showing us they have the money to buy the latest Nile TV-advertised multi-control air conditioning machines and to convert ridiculous amounts of electricity into cold air, we will be impressed by their profit margins? And are we supposed to be so warmed at the success of a section of Egypt's growing private sector that an overly cool draught is our uppermost desire?

Air conditioners don't have to be turned up full blast for customers to realise they exist and are turned on. Let's have more sense and less pretentiousness.

Lucy Haldin

Garden City

Sad situation

Sir - Sadly, the Sayeda Zeinah district, which should be one of the cleanest quarters of Cairo since it is a religious and touristic area, is one of the dirtiest. For their horrible stench, it is impossible to stand anywhere near the piles of garbage.

Why don't civil servants in a position of responsibility pay the slightest attention to this situation?

Sami Henna

Fayoum

Weekly missing

Sir - I am so grateful for having discovered *Al-Ahram Weekly*. It is such a help in following the news in English. The cultural, political and historical articles help regular readers enhance their linguistic capabilities.

I thank those responsible for producing this fine paper for all their efforts. Unfortunately I must inform you that the *Weekly* very often does not reach the

news-stands in Tama (Sohag Governorate). Please make sure that Tama receives its share of the *Weekly*. Reverend Sabir Aziz Asaad Tama, Sohag

Ghali for two

Sir - The world has angrily received the attempt on the part of the US to have UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali from being re-elected for a second term. The US play will only expose its own malicious intentions since it knows that Ghali's re-election would not serve US interests nor go along with the Israeli-American strategy based on the security of the Zionist entity in the Middle East.

No-one can deny that the Clinton administration's role to re-activate the Middle East peace process on various axes is intended to dodge the perils of the political tensions in the region, stemming from Israeli intransigence as regards carrying out Oslo and Taba accords.

As a matter of fact, Ghali took over the UN organisation in the aftermath of the Gulf war under very difficult circumstances. Nonetheless, he has steered the rudder of reconciliation and peace safely to shore. Ghali undoubtedly exerted the utmost effort to iron out grave disputes all over the world and his perspective is unmatched by the Americans.

The Arab world, alongside the OAU, is persistently advocating Ghali's re-election for a second term. In my mind Ghali rightfully condemned the Qana Massacre in south Lebanon. We all hail and bow out of respect for Ghali's valour. He was unable to muzzle his vigilant conscience before the US pressure as well as the American Congress with its overwhelming majority of Jews.

And, the G7 could not ignore Ghali's eminent role in the regional and international arenas in their latest meeting in Lyon under the chairmanship of French President Jacques Chirac. Ashraf Faragallah Saad English Language Teacher Beal-Snef

Keeping it simple

Avant-garde theatres are notorious for making the simplest of texts seem unfathomably deep, impenetrably complex or bafflingly convoluted. In Egypt, however, the state-funded avant-garde theatre, El-Tal'at, has always manifested a definite bias for simplicity. From birth, it seemed to have been infected with the debilitating virus of facile political interpretation. There, texts are rarely, if ever, ransacked for their hidden meanings, paradoxes or metaphoric potential, or even used as a vehicle for projecting some original, imaginative reading of reality. Any honest investigation of ideology, the cultural heritage, or the human condition seems out of the question; all problematic issues are, as a rule, summarily axed or blithely eschewed. Upon arrival, texts, old or new, and of whatever denomination, are routinely rushed to some mysterious dramaturgical operating theatre where they undergo a serious, extensive 'simplification surgery'. From there, they emerge as inert, skeletal frames, devoid of life and significance. Next comes the grotesque stage of dressing these ghostly entities in the most fashionable political slogans of the day, preparatory to parading them on stage.

This savage policy of 'simplification' and 'dehumanisation' has been diligently pursued, cultivated, and refined by El-Tal'at over the years, and has given us a long string of insipid, vacuous, and dangerously propagandist shows. There have been exceptions, of course, but they have been extremely few and far between. When Samir El-Asfour was artistic and executive director of the company, there were times — very brief and erratic spells — when he would shake off his deep-seated gloom and nihilistic apathy and come up with an astonishingly stirring and provocative spectacle. Soon enough, however, he would scurry back to his protective shell of cynicism, sink into lethargic indifference, and sluggishly blunder the younger generation merrily whither on.

The present director of the theatre, Mahmoud El-Alfi, however, is a kindly, jovial man who ardently believes in the virtues of simplicity. For this year's experimental festival (which starts on 1 September) he commissioned a young dramatist to prepare a simplified version of Tawfiq El-Hakim's *O, Tree-Climber* and Sayed Mohamed Ali has dutifully obliged, making sure that his adaptation can accommodate as many songs and dances as the director, Ashraf El-Nu'mani, could squeeze in. It was the same treatment administered to

Nehad Selaiha finds simplicity confused with simple-mindedness at El-Tal'at



Tawfiq El-Hakim

Fernando Arrabal's *Le Labyrinthe* last year at the same venue, and I remember thinking at the time how the poor author must be writhing [indeed, spinning] in his grave. Having watched *O, Tree-Climber* I have come to the conclusion that for the next 30 days at least, Tawfiq El-Hakim will be indulging in a similar exercise.

On the opening night I met the adapter who tried to enlist my sympathies beforehand by explaining to me that his version was what El-Hakim really had in mind but failed to achieve. 'He [El-Hakim] had wanted to write an absurd drama,' he said, but ended up producing 'a straight text with nothing about what was in El-Hakim's mind when he wrote it.'

c) that I liked the play very much and did not care a pin about its dramatic provenance — absurd or otherwise and d) that I was there to enjoy theatre

and hoped for a good performance.

It was not a good performance and the printed text of the play provides, in the reading, a much more exhilarating theatrical experience. It opens with a murder-mystery situation in which a very rational and stolid police inspector investigates the mysterious disappearance (suspected murder?) of an ordinary housewife. He questions the maid, then the husband, and gradually it dawns upon him that both are stark raving mad. Soon, the investigation turns into a nightmare in which time and space become fluid and amorphous and where the past exists physically side by side with the present and the future. As the inspector loses all his rational props and approaches total disorientation, the wife reappears, fails to account for her absence, and is subsequently killed by the husband (as a certain mysterious 'dervish' he once met on a train had prophesied he would do). When he rings up the inspector to report the crime, he discovers that the body has mysteriously disappeared.

Ultimately, of course, *O, Tree-Climber* is a 'play of ideas' which proposes the impossibility of knowing the

truth and contrasts the rational, progressive view of life with the pagan, cyclic one. But it does so by harnessing the conventions of the two surviving genres of truly popular theatre: farce and the whodunnit — both of which require intricate plot and simplified characterisation. For once, El-Hakim was able to hit upon a suitable theatrical vehicle for his ideas, and produced a play that vividly recalled the wit and theatrical exuberance of a Joe Orton play.

The Tal'at production fell dismally short of achieving either wit or profundity. The hilarious contrast between the highly formal language the characters speak and their seemingly crazy behaviour disappeared thanks to the adaptation which replaced El-Hakim's imaginative classic Arabic with a dull, incoherent brand of colloquial speech. Apart from this, and the many foisted songs and dances, the adaptation consisted in presenting El-Hakim's play as 'a play-within-a-play'. The frame-play which the dramatist supplied to 'correct' El-Hakim's text, as he said, consists of an initial scene in which a theatre director appears to explain to us ad nauseam how he had been forced by the theatre manager to undertake directing El-Hakim's play. After many embarrassing jokes and forced attempts at humour he falls asleep. I foolishly thought it was a sign for the play prop-

er to begin: I imagined the adapter wanted to present to us as a dream of this particularly silly director and was prepared to accept that. Instead, it turned out to be a sign for the dancers to begin. What followed was a weird concoction of erratic scenes from the play, badly mauled and severely mutilated, interspersed with the director's screaming objections and brief squabbles with the actors and stagehands, and doused with sentimental political songs about social justice and the rich and the poor. At times I was not quite sure whether I was watching El-Hakim's play, an animal fable, a silly didactic play or a shoddy pantomime; and once or twice I was almost sure I had mistakenly walked into a stupid children's show. Still, I was prepared to forgive all this; sloppy, mushy shows are, after all, around us in abundance. But then came the cruellest cut of all; the funny, quizzical 'dervish' El-Hakim's emissary of The Absurd, suddenly appeared in tails and top-hat as the emissary of the US, remote-controlling all the characters on stage. I am all for denouncing 'the new world order'; but what about the integrity of art?

EXHIBITIONS

Ibrahim Abdel-Ghani
Atelier du Centre, El-Radi, Sidky
Hall, 2 Karni El-Dawla St, Downtown
Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm, 6pm-10pm

Alaa El-Sherif (Sculptures) & Ali El-Sabahi (Sculptures)
Atelier du Centre, El-Nagim Hall, 2
Karni El-Dawla St, Downtown, Tel
574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm,
6pm-10pm

Group Show
Taharawi Gallery, 8 Champollion
St, Downtown, Tel 578 4494. Daily
exc Fri, 10am-6pm

Show featuring the works of artists
who have exhibited at the gallery during
the past six years.

Hellenic Library
Foundation for Hellenic Culture, 6
Alfa El-Taymouria St, Garden City,
Tel 333 1871. Daily exc Sat & Sun,
10am-3pm

A display of books about Greece in
Greek, English, French and Arabic.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed
Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafar El-Ashkid St, Dokki, Tel
336 3376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm,
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth
century European art, amassed by
the late Mahmoud Khalil, including
works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gains-
bourg, Monet and Rodin.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir St, Downtown, Tel 575 4319.
Daily exc Fri, 9am-5pm; Fri 9am-
11.15am & 1pm-3pm

Outstanding collection of Ptolemaic
and Ptolemaic treasures and the con-
temporaneous museum's room.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo, Tel 362 8766.
Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-
11am & 1pm-3pm

Founded in 1910, the museum houses
the largest collection of Coptic art and
artifacts in the world.

Islamic Museum
Part Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab
El-Khalq, Tel 390 9930/390 1320.
Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-
11.15am & 1pm-3pm

A vast collection of Islamic arts and
crafts including *mashrafiya*, lustre-
ware, ceramics, textiles, woodwork
and coins, drawn from Egypt's Fa-
timid, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods
and other countries in the Islamic
world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian
Art
Opera House Grounds, Giza, Tel
340 6841. Daily exc Mon, 10am-
1pm & 3pm-5pm

A permanent display of paintings
and sculpture charting the
modern art movement in Egypt
from its earliest pioneers to latest
practitioners.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Chateau Pyramide, 9 Mahmoud
Al-Gundi St, Giza,
Tel 333 2404. Daily exc

A museum devoted to the paintings
of Mohamed Nagui (1888-
1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Giza, Tel 574 6730.
Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm, 6pm-10pm

A permanent collection of works
by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar
(d. 1934), whose granite monu-
ment to Saint Zaphiel stands near
Qasr El-Nil Bridge.

Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr
El-Nil St, Garden City,
Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-
1pm, 6pm-10pm

Directed by Kai Kinnari, the film fol-
lows the history of the great tea mas-
ter Sen no Rikyu as he imports the
tea of a mythical tea ceremony to his
disciple.

Maulana Abul Kalam Centre for
Islamic Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St,
Downtown, Tel 392 5162.
Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm, 6pm-10pm

Over 15 August, 1996, the in-
formation provided is valid through to
Sunday after which it is to be checked
with the cinema.

Al-Gabali Ibrahim (A Woman's Hell)
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Tel 250
0254. Daily 12.30, 3.30pm, 6.30pm &
9.30pm. With Fifi Abdou.

My Fall
Rivoli II, 25th July St, Downtown, Tel
575 3053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm,
6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm

Starring Hisham Salah Selim and
Sherihan as a husband and wife who,
upon being given the opportunity of
choosing a new father, choose the same
man and end up as siblings.

Al-Hayat Al-Ashki (Ashki's Dream)
Talaat Harb St, Tel 262 9407. Daily
10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm

Meet Ahmed Ali's debut film ex-
plores the intimate lives of three wom-
en played by Laila Eloui, Elham Sha-
hin and Hala Sedqi.

Shagwan Asfah (Childish Mischief)
Cosmos II, 12 Emadaddin St, Down-
town, Tel 779 337. Daily 11am, 1pm,
3pm, 6pm & 9pm

Lightful (Assassination)
Diana Palace, 17 El-Ahli St, En-
adeldin, Downtown, Tel 924 727.
Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm

Listings

Roxy, Roxy Sq, Helwan, Tel 258
0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm
Faten Mahanna, Musical, El-Radi,
Tel 364 9767. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm
& 9pm. Ramses Hilton II, Corniche
El-Nil St, Tel 574 7436. Thurs mid-
night show.

Nasser '96
Spoken, Spoken Sq, Mohammedat, Tel
346 4017. Daily 8pm, Normandy, 31
El-Ahram St, Tel 250 0254. Thursday
& Saturday midnight show. El-
Ramses, El-Ramses St, Giza, Tel 383
8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm &
9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki, Tel
333 5726. Daily 8pm, 9pm & 9pm.

MGH, Maadi Grand Mall, Kollety
El-Nasr Sq, Maadi, Tel 332 3066. Daily
10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tel
333 4726. Thursday & Saturday midnight
show. Cosmos II, 12 Emadaddin St,
Downtown, Tel 779 337. Daily 10am,
1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. 23 Em-
adaddin St, Downtown, Tel 934 284.
Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The season of Nasser '96 coincides
with the fortieth anniversary of the na-
tionalisation of the Suez Canal. With
Ahmed Zaki to the lead.

Crimes Title
El-Horreyia I, El-Horreyia Mall, Roxy,
Helwan, Tel 258 0344. Daily 1pm, 3pm,
6pm & 9pm

The US may or may not be at war, the
crew of a nuclear submarine must de-
cide. With Denzel Washington and
Gene Hackman.

Dustbin Checks In
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St,
Helwan, Tel 293 1072. Daily
3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm and Thurs
midnight show. Radda, 24 Talaat Harb
St, Downtown, Tel 375 6363. Daily
10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

A con artist checks into a hotel to pull
some scams. His accomplice, Dunston
the orangutan, has ideas of his own.

Fair Game
Karni II, 15 Emadaddin St, Down-
town, Tel 574 6730. Daily 1pm, 3pm,
6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St,
Tel 250 0254. Daily at 7.30.

She is a woman with a secret who
someone wants to silence and be the
cop who's going to help her... whether
she likes it or not. With Cynid Craw-
ford and William Baldwin.

Nick of Time
El-Horreyia II, El-Horreyia Mall, Roxy,
Helwan, Tel 258 0344. Daily 1pm, 3pm,
6pm & 9pm. Ramses Hilton I, Cor-
niche El-Nil St, Tel 574 7436. Daily

A Repair from the Mahmoud Khalil collection
10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm &
9.30pm

Sublime
Ramses Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St,
Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm,
3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Sidney Pollack directs Harrison Ford
and Julia Ormon.

The American President
Metro, 33 Talaat Harb St, Downtown,
Tel 392 5077. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm,
6pm & 9pm.

The president is a widower and about
to fall in love. With Annette Bening
and Michael Douglas.

The Net
El-Horreyia I, El-Horreyia Mall, Roxy,
Helwan, Tel 258 0344. Thursday & Saturday
midnight show.

A thriller starring a computer and Sme-
dra Bullock.

Judge Dredd
Cairo Showroom, El-Galaa St, Giza,
Tel 360 0081. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm,
3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
Karni I, 15 Emadaddin St, Downtown,
Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm,
6pm & 9pm.

Futuristic action film with Sylvester
Stallone and Wesley Snipes.

MUSIC
Arabic Taktik
Open Air Theatre, Opera House
grounds, Giza, Tel 342 0598. 15 Au-
gust, 9.00pm.

Alexandria Chamber Orchestra
Open Air Theatre, Opera House
grounds, Giza, Tel 342 0598. 16 Au-
gust, 9pm.

Conducted by Saeid Mohieddin.

Alexandria Chamber Orchestra
Open Air Theatre, Opera House
grounds, Giza, Tel 342 0598. 17 Au-
gust, 9pm.

Conducted by Saeid Mohieddin.

Mexican folk troupe
Open Air Theatre, Opera House
grounds, Giza, Tel 342 0598. 20 Au-
gust, 9pm.

Polish folk troupe
Open Air Theatre, Opera House

grounds, Giza, Tel 342 0598. 21 Au-
gust, 9pm.

Polish folk troupe
Open Air Theatre, Opera House

grounds, Giza, Tel 342 0598. 21 Au-
gust, 9pm.

Polish folk troupe
Open Air Theatre, Opera House

grounds, Giza, Tel 342 0598. 21 Au-
gust, 9pm.

Music

Crash, bang, wallop

A few less bumps
and not so big, writes
David Blake

Sharqiyat; Fathy Salama; Akhenaten Chamber Orchestra; Sherif Mohieddin, conductor; Manal Mohieddin, harp solo; Cairo Opera Open Air Theatre, 9 August

Be prepared, the Sharqiyat outfit is here, geared for sound, armed for action — a panzer attack. You may have heard of them before, if not — the confrontation can be trying. They have a strange Edgar Allan Poe aura, and it fits them perfectly. They are known outside Egypt, in places not usually hospitable to the Egyptian perspective. There are those who are for and those who are against. The antagonists say the group are not Egyptian at all; they are polyglot, decayed and synthetic, sometimes, even, cynical. But worse, their appeal here is confined to expatriates. Their camp followers will praise anything kitsch.

The force say this is just sour grapes at their big disc sales and public, for Sharqiyat does have a large public. They are in the front line of those attempting to fuse pop with other, even classical, elements. It is difficult for groups such as Sharqiyat to do this because there is no avant-garde anywhere, nothing to revolt against — do as you like, the field is strewed with the corpses of jazz musicians who tried to turn music into something else. We have had the lot as far as the ear goes. But pop is ever hopeful that another messiah is about to take music into the 21st century. So far so good. Sharqiyat has courage, are brave and will have a go at anything. They put everything into the washing machine, regardless of what it says on those little

coded labels. All the colours and tempo go into it. The result? Often not so good, though sometimes riveting. In the case of Sharqiyat, when they hit a target, it is the heart centre. So either you drop dead or find it lovely. There is thinking to do. Relationships grow up out of the music. It is rare to find a plagiarist. It is original, can be watched and heard as something living. They have discarded all the reliable antiquities. The stuff, the phrases and lines of thought, are newly presented. Sometimes, something from the cheap furniture store on the corner bumps into a classy purchase gathered at one of the better flea markets. And it is the better pieces that survive the collision with playing that is alive and full of kicks and jabs.

This group is a sextet plus one — Fathy Salama at the piano. Each member should be ooted. Ayman Sidqi, percussion; Ramadan Mansour, tabla; Salah El-Artis, accordion; Mohamed Abdel-Rahim, nay; Ahmed Anwar, bass; Domingo Prehissala, trumpet. These players are each capable of topping the hill and they were generously given starlight attention by the production. They are scattered over the front stage. Isolated like guerrilla fighters, they produced some remarkable turns from the bushes at the sides. Centre was trumpet, who wan-

dered around the stage, leaving the place for our eight who had not yet appeared. But the instrument, the harp, showed who to expect. Far left came Fathy Salama himself at the piano. He's a knock-out or a nightmare, depending on which way you look. Forget Mifusko Ushida, this player is as far out on his own particular storm cloud as she. And he brings mighty weather changes. He sits there at the keys, not really moving his body at all. He is rock-steady, straight as a die and anonymously buried within the group. The days of wrath have come.

If he can do this with his own music, perhaps Cairo could let him loose on some of the classics which are crying out for a helping hand to keep them out of the tomb. Fathy Salama makes the piano jump as Jelly Roll Morton. He leads the band with furious speed and it is occasionally thrilling to see how he beats them to the ultimate note in a down hill flight that leads directly into a stone wall at the bottom.

The first half of the concert was boring — no fault of the players or the individual pieces which were nicely named ("Rast", "Sultany", "Yalla"). The amplification was the best heard in Cairo for years. No groans, grunts or blasts of indefensible noise. The Sharqiyat had precision and clear tone. None of them stuck into the auditorium but flooded out into

the oavy blue beyond. The boredom came with the repetition. This is insupportable when the melody is not strong enough to carry it off and is not helped by the accents of the big bottom bass bumps. A few less bumps and not so big would have helped. As it was, the trumpet carried the first half. Very little rubato and hardly any vibrato. No wavering sound at all, but sweet and tuneful, rare for trumpets. The group music itself stuck to grey for the coming storm. We had this at the end before the break. Even the piano was sinking. "Fathy's Mood" was black, "Nabawood" was Stygian. No rescue rockets went up, but it ended flat. The slate was clean.

Prize time would straighten out the damage. The empty places in the band were filled by players of the Akhenaten Chamber Orchestra. Their conductor Sherif Mohieddin, very late, eventually arrived and the second part of the concert had begun. Gone was the bass fuzz, gone the dark, damp rhythms. The concert had made a second start and a new beginning. Aladdin had polished his lamp and we were off into bandit country. The new arrival — number eight of the group — was Manal Mohieddin, harpist. She began a piece, alongside Fathy Salama and the group and made it quite clear from the first notes that she had arrived. And the way her tone struck in

and out of the basal quality of the group was astounding. The harp is not percussive or especially assertive. But Mohieddin's harp, at the beginning of her playing, was all these things. And she gave it a twang. The playing was far removed from the classical mode to which she is used, well into Salama's area of blue good-bye jazz. Her playing had zest and life. Piano and harp do not make a good blend. But this harp took no second place, striking out sharp and metallic. Gone were Debussy and the romantic 19th century French. Manal Mohieddin and her usually well-behaved friends let down their hair into 1996. After a few solo shots we had a composition by Sherif Mohieddin — though that was not mentioned on the programme. This was some of his best music since the Atan Donqol songs. The orchestra was able to go up a step further onto a new level of sound. Light, high-toned and incisive, full of bubbling white wine colours.

Big belly drum was put far out of the picture. Flute and harp came to the fore with witty, ironic variations. The piece went off in shimmering waves. It was mantric and vibratory: searing was hearing. If the Akhenaten can do wonders with Hazzel, as they did last year, why not a symphonic piece by Elliott Carter. This last section of the Sharqiyat concert showed in Mohieddin's music that there is more to Egypt than felucca, fellah and palm tree. There is a new excitement without as yet a name. But it reverses the mantra. Hearing is seeing.

Around the galleries



Ahmed Omar

CHILDREN and flowers, the subject of 50 collages by Feri Abdel-Meneim, currently on show at the Centre for Arts, Zamalek utilise warm colours and thread to contribute to their overall decorative effect. Also on show at the Centre for Arts are paintings by Ezzedine Mohamed and engravings on wood by Ahmed Omar. Mohamed's paintings burst with crowds, attending weddings, catching trains, while Omar's bold, dramatic engravings toy with human anatomy, combining the iconic with the surreal.

The Opera House Gallery shows 52 ink drawings on wood and engravings by Saad Abu Shadi. Repeated motifs (a child, a plant, a house, the sun or moon) are reduced to their geometrical correlatives (the triangle, the square and, particularly prominent, the circle) without, however, totally departing from the figurative.

Space at the Atelier du Centre is given over to three exhibitions: geometrical abstractions in acrylics by Khaled El-Dawlati, engravings on wood of political prisoners in Israel by Ahmed Hussein Nassif and paintings in pastel colours inspired by Islamic art by Magdi Kamel.

Reviewed by Margaret El-Ashraf

Dreaming of Baghdad

"Another Iraqi swallowed by exile, only this time we recognise a name, a face. But the Iraqi diaspora is forever expanding; we can no longer memorise names or faces. Exile has swallowed so many, as did the frost and the bars of the cities of exile. They fade, just like the images of their ancestors on the walls and their wailing music fade... The wandering Iraqi, banished from beneath the burning sun of his native earth, living beneath leaden skies, is *le fou de l'Irak*."

"Those who left Iraq in consecutive waves of migration all carried in their heart the baked mud, the incomparably fertile earth. It is a mad fertility, blooming on the margins of the desert, a fertility that grows from the desert's cruelty, the wildness of the river, the delicacy of the palm tree and the smoothness of mud."

"The passing of the Arab Kurdish Iraqi Buland Al-Hydari is frightful. It reminds us that the earth carried in the heart can be desiccated and broken before the eye has quenched its thirst with the sight of Baghdad. It reminds us that, among everything else exile is, exile is a cemetery."

Abbas Baidoun, Lebanese poet



Baghdad

This charming dark lady, why do I never see her except mourning with hunched back, with decomposing skin, or gasping with the news that her kin are dead, or in the worms breeding between the eyes of the murdered and in dark ruins where death lingers,

where there is nothing but the silence of ash? Baghdad, this charming dark lady, why do I never see her

except in a face promising death and another face, caught in the eyes of rogues, weighing my every move? I never see her except as a whip, roaring with laughter in the palm of the executioner

And here I am declaring

that of all your thoroughfares I own nothing but my shadow, that I am frightened of the mud drawing me from or into the pool, and am frightened of time making me frail, stooping my pine with humiliation, with the force of your rancour and mine. I am scared of seeing in the mirror nothing but my face in the eyes of a serf. Baghdad, who is to save me from that homeland

sunk deep in rotting sadness, for I am frightened that one day I will carry my death with hunched back, just like you.

Baghdad, I apologise. A dawn will come, the sun will be reborn even if the rendezvous is in the grave.

Buland Al-Hydari

Caught in shifting sands

By Faisal Darraj

In a study on the Iraqi poet Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra once wrote that Kees's understanding of Shakespeare's writings as a commentary on his life could apply equally to Al-Sayyab. The same might be said of Buland Al-Hydari, a Kurd in Iraq and an Iraqi in exile, a man drowning in the distance that separates both.

Buland Al-Hydari's life was divided between two exiles or more, something that makes of his death a testimony that closes the circle between what is said in poetry and what is lived. Everything he wrote was about wandering, about alienation and the flabbiness of being. His testimony, though, borders on the tragic when it speaks of the fate of poetic modernism in Iraq. Buland Al-Hydari, a pioneer of modernism in Iraq, died far from the Iraq ruled by those who are addicted to the murder of poetry.

The world of Buland Al-Hydari gave onto many panoramas. These include the pioneering writings of Al-Sayyab, El-Malika, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and others. His first collection of poetry, *Pulse of the Mud*, published in 1946, forms, along with the writings of El-Malika and Al-Sayyab, an important crossroads in Arab culture. It was the writings of these poets that launched what was termed *al-shi'ur al-hal*, but which in the 30s and 40s was called, a little more prosaically, "the young way to write poems". It was a way that opened new horizons for poetry, dictating an understanding of the poem that departed radically from a centuries long tradition.

Opposed to a perspective celebrating rhetoric, ready-made images and narrow references, Buland Al-Hydari made of poetry an open, existentialist quest predicated on the constant rediscovery of the details of the physical world. He made of the poem a renewable, constantly mutating object, whose origins were to be found not in written texts but in the sensitivities of the individual in his interaction with the world.

It may be that Buland Al-Hydari's penchant for questioning the invisible, the inner depths of an alienated soul, dictated the break made in his poetry with logical deductions and received meanings. His poetry celebrates the image, images that do not resemble a static world or even deal with his known borders. Instead, he attempted to give voice to the hidden, the ambiguous, chasing the ever-changing dynamic, something which made Jabra

Ibrahim Jabra describe him as a poet of images. And while it is true that Al-Hydari's writing did intimate a new path for Arabic poetry, the poet was also presenting a new perspective for the whole world, a perspective that could express the anxieties and tensions of a rebellious soul that, having found a truth would immediately lose it. It is as if the essence of being a poet lies in a sad and shambling search for a truth that can never be found.

In *Dead Cities* Buland Al-Hydari presents us with an image of a poet searching for an impossible world, formulating dreams only to shatter them and indulge in re-arranging the pieces. Maroun Aboud once said of Al-Hydari: he does not dream of Baghdad, it is Baghdad that dreams of him.

In his sceptical search, which resulted in poetry but which led to no other destination, Al-Hydari becomes the very image of the sad poet forever transforming life into a poem that cannot be finished, and transforming the poem into experience, in search of an elusive form that, once discovered becomes obsolete.

It is this search for ever novel forms for the poem that sums up Buland Al-Hydari's experience from his first collection, *The Pulse of the Mud* (1946) to his last, *A Return to the Past* (1993).

It may be that the form Al-Hydari chose dictated his attempts to use silence as a medium: his poetry does not tell of anything except the experience of its writer and says nothing except what the limits of language allows, it conceals more than it reveals by remaining open to infinite suggestions. Such a poetic project is shrouded in doubts, overloaded with complexity. While refusing to recognise rhetoric or lyricism, it continues to inscribe circles around itself, dispersed between vague incantation and the faltering confessional.

No matter how many questions Al-Hydari's poetic project arouses, he will remain, always, a modernist poet who, in refusing the path of classical aesthetics, with its flowery tools, spent his life chasing an ambivalent aesthetic concocted in an intense appreciation of estrangement. In the maze of alienation, in the attempt to negate this state, poetry becomes an existential experience, and language becomes the form of being before it is a means of communication. Words, language, express nothing but man's inability to speak up.

Al-Hydari: the Iraqi exile

By Mona Anis

A small notice in *Al-Hayat* newspaper last Thursday announced:

"The funeral of poet Buland Al-Hydari will proceed on Friday August 9, at 10.30 am from Regent Park Mosque to his final burial place at Highgate Cemetery in North London."

I had missed the news of his death announced the previous day as I was heading back home from a journey which brought me once again in contact with some of the men and women belonging to those tens of thousands of Iraqi exiles dispersed all over the four corners of the globe. This time, though, the meeting place was not London, Amsterdam or Copenhagen, but Qamishli, a Syrian border town near Kurdistan, to which many Iraqis fly thousands of miles just to get a whiff of the homeland by paying a brief visit to the safe haven established in Iraqi Kurdistan following the Gulf War.

The news of the death of Al-Hydari in London enhanced my sense of the Iraqi tragedy, the Kurdish plight and the meaning of exile, for in Buland all these elements blend richly: an Iraqi-Kurd with a Muslim-Arab culture, a pioneer who sought to revolutionise Arab poetry and whose final resting place will be none other than the cemetery housing the remains of Karl Marx. Only the state of exile can embrace such paradoxes.

If exile is, as Salman Rushdie once said, a state that must not be confused with all the other words that people throw around: emigrant, expatriate, refugee, immigrant; if it is, as he emphasises, "a dream of glorious return, a vision of revolution: Elba not St Helena," then of all the Arabs I have seen during the years I lived abroad only Iraqis can lay claim to this exile state, to the tragic dimensions and poignant imagery such a state entails.

In the late 1970s, while living in London and working for the Committee Against Repression in Iraq, I witnessed the beginning of a chapter of the tragedy of the Iraqi exile. Hundreds of Iraqis reached the British capital after being subjected to the most inhumane tortures and persecution. Month after month their numbers swelled, and the Iraqi exile began to expand to other North European capitals and cities. For me, the one thing that distinguished those Iraqis I knew from the rest of the Arab refugees was that from the minute they arrived they talked about return. They even exuded confidence regarding their triumphant return. Those were the years of

the Elba dream.

More than 15 years have elapsed, and I am sure that the image of St Helena must have crossed the minds of some of those Iraqi exiles who attended the burial ceremony of Buland Al-Hydari last Friday. It is only human that after so many years of exile and so many tragedies befalling Iraq some of this nation's most gifted and dedicated sons and daughters should begin to question whether they will have a place at the 'rendezvous of victory'. But then it was Buland Al-Hydari who said:

Baghdad, I apologise. A dawn will come, the sun will be reborn even if the rendezvous is in the grave.

Born in Baghdad to a Kurdish family in 1926, died London 1996; left school in 1944; opened *Le Temps Perdu*, an artists' cafe and publishing house in Baghdad, a gathering place for artists like Gawad Selim and Fayek Hassan and writers like Bayati and Tckarti. The cafe was eventually closed by the police. Director of 14 July Art Gallery (1959-1962); arrested during the 1963 coup; lived in Beirut between 1965-1976; returned to Baghdad between 1976 and 1980 where he occupied the post of managing editor of the cultural publication *Afraq Arabiya* (Arab Horizons); lived in Europe, mainly England, since the beginning of the 1980s and until his death.

Works: *Khafat al-Ten* (The Pulse of Mud, 1946); *Aghani al-Madina al-Hayati* (Songs of the Dead City, 1951); *Humma' al-Fajr* (You Came with Dawn, 1961); *Kharwat fi al-Ghorba* (Steps in Foreign places, 1965); *Rihlat al-Huruf al-Sufi* (Journey of the Yellow Letters, 1968); *Aghani al-Haris al-Mutab* (Songs of a Weary Guard, 1971); *Hwar al-Abd al-Ahmad al-Thalatha* (A Dialogue Across Three Dimensions, 1972); *Illo Beirut ma Tahiat* (To Beirut With Regards, 1984); *Abwab ila al-Bayt al-Dayiq* (Doors to the Narrow House, 1990); *Awadh ila al-Madi* (A return to the past, 1993); *Zaman li Kul al-Azminah* (A Time for All Times, essays, 1981); *Madhal ila al-Shi'r al-Iraqi al-Hadith* (An Introduction to Modern Iraqi Poetry, essays, 1987); *Doroub fi al-Monfo* (Alleyways through Exile, essays, 1996).

Plain Talk

Perhaps, with age, one does indeed grow more patriotic, more attached to one's country. This is certainly how I feel. Lately my attachment to Egypt has become increasingly sentimental. Not that such attachment did not exist before. It is simply that with the passing of the years it has become more pronounced, having reached a pitch now where I am becoming increasingly intolerant of any criticism levelled at my country.

Alongside this nationalism there is, of course, a sense of pride in being an Egyptian, a pride that was recently given a boost with the announcement that Cairo had been selected by UNESCO as the cultural capital of the Arab world. The honour bestowed upon Cairo, though, should not be allowed to obscure the cultural activities of the city that has every right to be considered the second capital of Egypt.

I am speaking of Alexandria, which in September will host two important events, its annual film festival, together with the Alexandria World Festival. This latter event will take place between the 19-28 September.

I was a little surprised to discover that there are 44 cities and towns called Alexandria, and each of them is to be represented at the festival. Folk troupes will perform the dances typical of the regions in which these towns are located.

I should like to posit a suggestion. Why not select Alexandria as a Mediterranean cultural capital? There is no reason why the common economic and social policies increasingly pursued by nations bordering the Mediterranean should not be expanded to include cultural activities.

Certainly Alexandria's claims to such a title are very convincing. The city boasts a distinguished cultural history, and a flourishing present. The city has had a long and fascinating history, as it transformed itself from a convenient anchorage into a metropolis called the bride of the Mediterranean.

As John Rodenbeck writes: "Whenever a pipe organ is played, Archimedes' screw is used, an atlas or a Western calendar consulted, grammar, geography, mechanics and geometry are taught, poems, novels, plays or operas are performed or examined by critics or catalogued by a scholar, we think of Alexandria."

Alexandria was the home to one of the greatest libraries of the ancient world. It provided the institutional framework within which Zenodotus of Ephesus, Callimachus of Cyrene, Apollonius of Rhodes and Aristophanes of Byzantium all worked.

Many books have appeared on Alexandria, among the most celebrated being EM Forster's *History and Guide*. There is also John Marlowe's charming volume, *The Golden Age of Alexandria*, a comprehensive history that betrays the deep sympathy between subject and author. Marlowe gives a quotation from one of the Arab soldiers who conquered the city: "The moonlight reflected from the white marble made the city so bright that a tailor could see to thread his needle without a lamp."

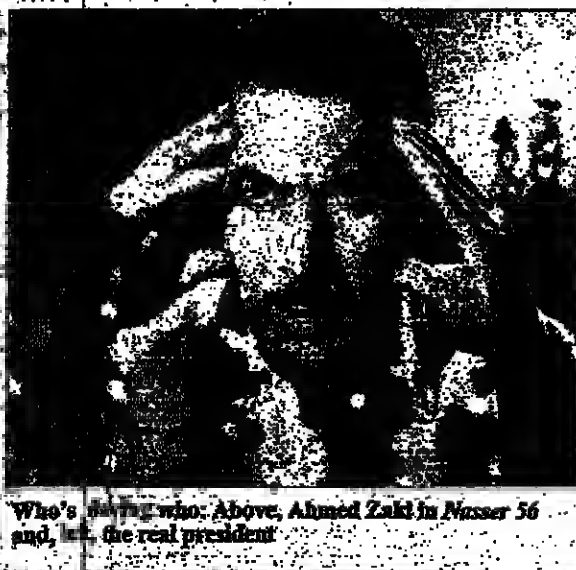
Alexandria was the greatest city of the Hellenic world, the centre of a huge empire whose intellectual tentacles spread across the oceans.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Cinema

Which Mr President?

Nasser 56 is a big hit. But while Nur Elmessiri is all for time-travel, she finds the recent past a far from different country



Who's who: Above, Ahmed Zaki in *Nasser 56* and, left, the real president

People are flocking to see *Nasser 56*, which naturally begs the question, why? Is it because we live in a late 20th century world where things no longer operate according to the rules of this vs that: Tradition vs modernity ceases to hold when you introduce post-modernity, capitalism vs socialism when you introduce the late stages of capitalism; the USSR vs US when one of them no longer exists; good vs evil when you introduce conflicting, equally viable interests; the people vs the oppressors when neither side of the equation can any longer be viewed as a monolith.

We want to take a break from the difficult business of living in a world ridden with political complexities and travel to the past when things were simple, to the days when the movies talked in black and white. But black and white films never really existed; they always came in shades of grey. Nor was the past ever simple except in as far as the 12 year-old living it may have been a less disenchanted creature than the one s/he grew into.

The late Gamal Abdel-Nasser was a richly complex human being and charismatic leader, with perhaps as many facets as the years in which he was Egypt's president. There is the Nasser who cared for the poor, the Nasser of Pan-Arabism, of Non-Alignment and so on. But the Nasser presented in this film is not the one who tried to address the issue of a society dramatically polarised between the rich and the poor, an issue still pressing with us. Why is that little boy hungry? — a question many a curious 12 year-old has asked, a question s/he might well have asked again at 20, 30, 50, 70. The past is still with us in more ways than we care to admit. Walter Benjamin was right. But so was Freud. We have a compulsion

to remember the past in a forgetful sort of way; we want a controllable past that neither irks nor niggles our present.

The poor and an Israel still predicated on the displacement of over three million Palestinians are still with us, still stories without endings. The Suez Canal, however, is another story, one that began and ended, a story of enemies who are no longer enemies, of issues which are no longer issues. It is part of a past that no longer touches us, except in a nostalgic sort of way. Once upon a time.

Flet: If you don't already know it, look up Suez in an encyclopedia or see *Nasser 56* in a cinema near you.

Props: Maps are *de rigueur*, and there are maps a plenty in *Nasser 56*. There is a map of the Arab world hanging behind the desk at which Nasser diligently does his homework. There is a map of the Nile to illustrate the importance of building a dam. There is a map showing the converging routes of the specialists implementing the Suez Canal takeover, and a map of the canal itself. There is a war map with parachutes and stars of David.

Characters: These could come under props. Well-intentioned though the actors and make-up artists may have been (and Ahmed Zaki and Feridun Abdel-Hamid, extremely competent actors both, did their best), the script dictated a two-dimensional approach. The film is peopled by stock characters — the ordinary man sacked because of being nationalistic in his own country, the elderly peasant woman from Nasser's village (played by Amira Riza), the good Greeks who did

not betray, plotting pashas who, bearing a striking resemblance to Lewis Carroll's hookah smoking caterpillar, provided instant commentary on the events as they unfolded.

Unfortunately the kind of footage that those searching for a nostalgia fix would want was in meagre supply. There was Eden, but no Nasser. Bari Mur appeared, as did vintage clips of '50s Cairo, an empty, orderly Tahrir Square with plumb, Ramses statue still functioning as fountain. Open Square when it still had an opera. The good old days. But then we cut to the handshake that launches the car-

ving out of the Suez take-over plan.

One of the film's aims was to "re-use" Nasser, to fill in the gap between the documentary footage of a charismatic Third World leader, on the one hand, and, on the other, Nasser, the human being with a family who also has non-political dreams (to see his children marry, to travel with his wife when he retires) with which we can all identify.

There are two problems with this. The first has to do with the assumption that Nasser needs to be humanised; the second, connected to the first, with the genre itself. Those who went to see the film did

not necessarily need to watch a feature film to have Nasser brought "closer" to them. He was, and for many still is, as close as a family member (not just in his capacity of *pater familias* — we are all too often reminded of the authoritarian implications of that particular familial role — but also as son and sibling). The audience who wanted a nostalgia fix already knew that Nasser preferred the kind of food that most Egyptians eat rather than the kind that very few of them do. Nor did they need a film to show them that his house was not air-conditioned, that it did not have a swimming pool, that he did not ship his family off to safety in Europe when the threat of invasion menaced the country.

So why make a film about Nasser? And how?

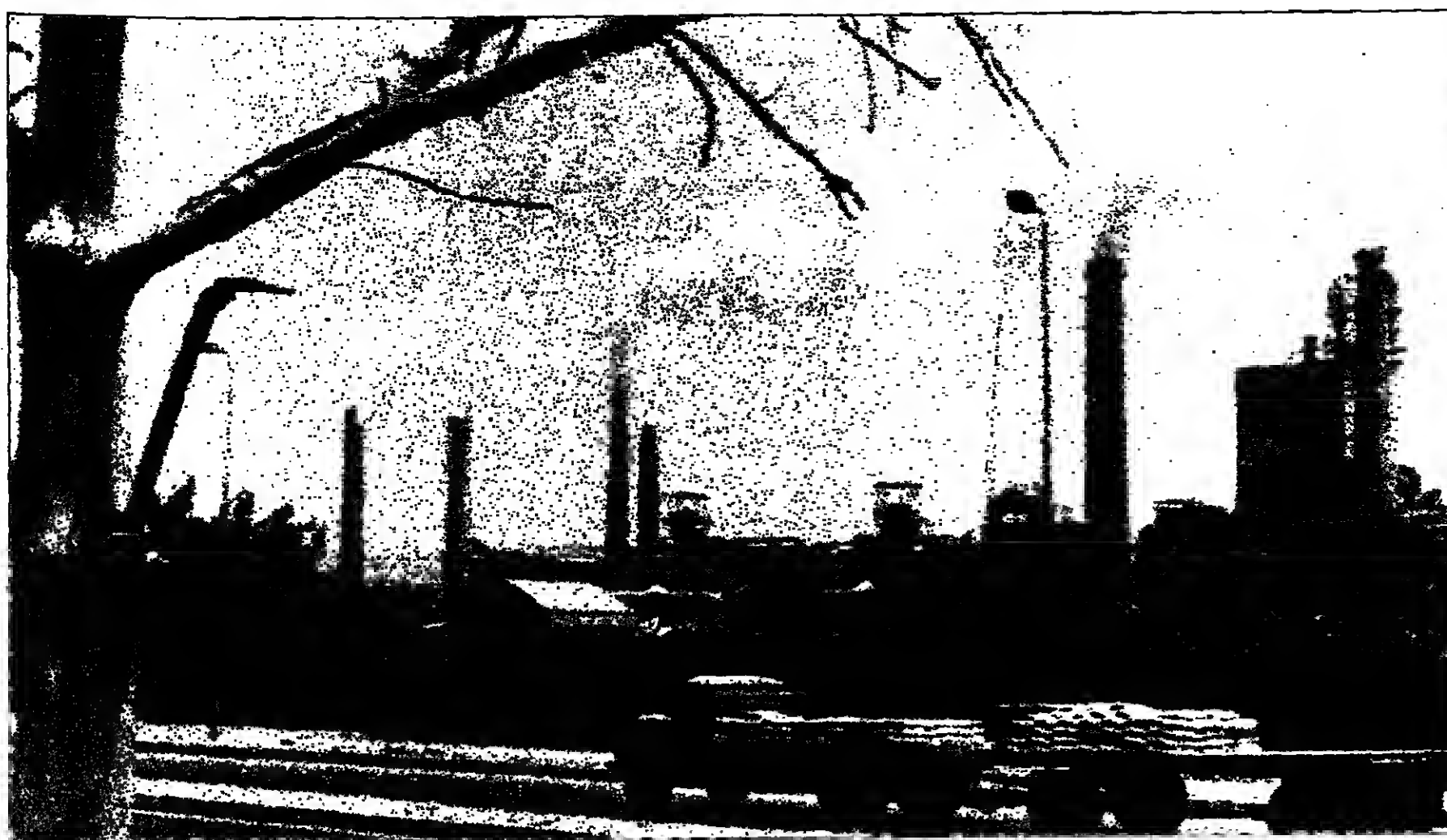
If you want to make an audience feel that they are really living the period, if you opt for a mimetic approach, dedicated actors are not enough. You need to have either the high tech equipment that in *Apollo 13* made even those most uninterested in outer space adventures sit up in their seats, or that eye for period detail with which Merchant-Ivory make the most anti-Edwardian of us feel at home in Forster-land.

Moralists and leaders are more difficult: creatives than astronauts or left-oriented upper-middle class Edwardians. *Gandhi*, huge budget out notwithstanding, can dis-

appoint if you have read his memoirs. But not everyone is inclined to the reading of memoirs nor do Third World readers always keep diaries. This is where movies come in: they can try, as in *Gandhi*, to fill the gaps that documentary footage enticingly opens up on to the all-too-human face of celebrities.

If you realise that there are some major pitfalls in the realist approach when dealing with mega-figures, that making St John the Baptist in *The Last Temptation of Christ* say "Come round everybody, we're all family" in a Greenwich village hippie-groupie sort of way might alienate those who have already established an intimacy with St John based on centuries of iconography, then you might opt for a more mythopoetic or stylised approach. This is what Pasolini did in *The Gospel According to St Matthew*. He threw out realist-local detail and kept to the letter of the stylised script.

Nasser 56 adopted neither a realistically convincing "he's just a man" approach to Nasser, nor a mythopoetic/stylised rendition of Nasser the Man-Symbol. Perhaps this was because Nasser — like many of the challenges to which he struggled to rise, like much of the suffering that kept him awake at night — is still, in many ways, with us. And perhaps it is precisely because this particular president has not been buried in the archives of a vacuum packed past that a good feature film on Nasser is such a challenge to make. We cannot relive Nasser's time, because we are still living it; we cannot mythologise it either because, in so many ways, it is still on earth and in this world. But if a nostalgia fix is a fictional return to an edited, highly selective approach to the past, an approach that shows how the past is touching but no longer touches us, then *Nasser 56* is a success.



A purple haze

Rates of pollution are on the rise, write **Ragi Hakim** and **Rafiq Ghabbour**. Dust is just as much a problem as it was centuries ago, but population growth and haphazard industrialisation mean that different contaminants have proliferated — and bode only ill for our health

Rows upon rows of spears, scintillating in the sun, glittering brocades, the Fatimid armies in anticipation. The Caliph Al-Mu'izz awaits a miracle. The Patriarch of Alexandria had to move the Mugattam Hills, as proof of his faith. Was it not said that faith, even as little as a mustard seed, could move mountains? Such a miracle, should it occur, would relieve the burgeoning city, built on a site chosen by astrologers for its pure air, from an unexpected nuisance: excessive dust-fall. The accusations were, and still are, directed at the Mugattam, seen as the main source of dust pollution in Cairo. No statistics are available regarding pollution in Fatimid times, but it is known that in the seventeenth century, the governor of Cairo ordered that the dust which lay, oozed out deep, on the city's streets, be skimmed off their surface. Again in the eighteenth century, a metre or so had to be dug away.

Today, more accurate rates have been worked out. If you are living in downtown Cairo and are tempted to record a telephone number on a glass pane cleaned one hour earlier, you are removing nearly 0.008 grams of dust per square centimetre. That makes about 58 tons per square kilometre per month. Not all areas of Cairo receive such an abundance of this earthly manna. Each area receives pollution from different sources, and the dust-fall and suspended particulate constituents differ too.

Of the many particles that may be found in the air, such as ash, minerals, hairs, wax, fungal spores, trichomes (plant hairs), insect parts, pollen, starch, sand, products of alluvial soil weathering and rock erosion, the large particles — greater than 0.002mm in diameter — that make dust are usually fly ash, coarse dirt. These are usually rapidly filtered out of the air. Particles of diameter less than that may remain in the air for long periods of time; the most hazardous to health are less than one quarter of that diameter.

When samples of air pollutants were analysed at the Air Pollution Department of the National Research Centre in Cairo, many compounds were found to exceed the allowed concentration standards, no matter how infinitesimally small. Elements that come mainly from industrial and urban activities are lead (0.04 per cent), cadmium, chromium, zinc, copper, nickel, cobalt, manganese, and iron (ranging from 0.08 per cent to 0.006 per cent). Light metals like magnesium, potassium, and calcium, on the other hand, are mainly from natural sources of pollution (from 13 to 0.8 per cent).

In the early sixties, when the first probes were carried out, analyses showed that natural sources, like the Mugattam Hills, were dominant. With the increase of industrialisation and population growth, anthropogenic sources took the lead. Quarries around Cairo contribute as well. "In the process of lime crushing, visibility is zero, beyond three metres, in an area several kilometres across," says Maher Mohamed, who exploits one of the limestone quarries around the capital. "It kills all the vegetation in the environs."

Cairo is also home to several industrial complexes. Shubra El-Kheima's 450-odd industrial plants, and the cement and iron industries in Helwan, discharge ash, tar, smoke, and other industrial pollutants into the air.

An alarming study supervised by the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) and carried out by a team of physicians from Helwan and Qasr El-Aini hospitals showed the relation between the respiratory system diseases and anaemia which afflict school-age children in Helwan, and the industrial pollution which severely affects their mental and physical growth.

The study, which covered a sample of 683 pupils in Helwan, showed that 60 per cent have chest pains and respiratory disorders; 62 per cent are anaemic; and 40 per cent suffer from chronic bronchitis.

chitis

It also showed that these pupils who are short and/or thin for their age study in schools in more polluted areas. Their IQ levels were also found to be below normal.

"Sixteen lines of cement production producing 200 million tons of cement dust daily are the main cause of all this. Children are not the only victims; a million citizens suffer from bronchitis, soft bones, dermal diseases, respiratory disorders and lung calcification," says Dr Samia El-Sayed, health affairs consultant for the EEAA.

Children in Helwan do not only breathe cement dust; the area is polluted to the tune of 478 tons of dirt and sand per square mile, while the internationally acceptable ratio does not exceed 15 tons. This high concentration impedes the passage of useful ultraviolet rays important to the development of children's fragile bones.

There are 212 schools with 181,000 students in Helwan. It is useful to keep these numbers in mind when remembering Minister of the Environment and the Business Sector Atif Ebeid's promises, made during last November's election campaign, that "the problem will end in two years. Pollution will decrease in the first year. We will reach the international limit two years from now. The government has saved \$21 million to combat pollution in Helwan. Seven million dollars a year

will be spent for the next three years," Ebeid had commented.

In Cairo, automobile exhaust is another dangerous source of pollution. Tarry matter emitted from exhaust pipes was extracted from dust (at levels of concentration reaching two per cent); hundreds of thousands of tons of gasoline and diesel oil are used in traffic alone. Although rates of total dust fall wane in the summer, maximum concentration of tarry matter occurs in this season. Meanwhile, there are no significant differences in air pollutant concentration levels between weekdays and weekends. Unlike Europeans, for example, Cairenes tend to spend their weekends in their city.

"Pollutants are usually emitted every day in the same quantities and qualities in a specific area. The weather is the only variable factor that can dilute or concentrate these pollutants," says Kamal Hindi of the National Research Council (NRC). For example, Old Cairo is the first district to receive both the dust from the Mugattam and industrial pollutants from Helwan transported by southerly winds. During the dust-laden *khamasin*, the atmosphere of Cairo is filled with large sand particles. The storms last from a few hours to a couple of days, depending on the nature of the low-pressure system concerned. "Rain is a cleansing agent for the atmosphere," says the NRC's Aliyya Ali. "But then it must be drained carefully, otherwise it is returned to the system." Pollution is worsening rapidly: "Lead concentration, for instance, has increased almost five-fold in the past ten years," she adds. She recommends that "multi-story parking lots be built outside the downtown area" and "combustion sources in Cairo must be well maintained and carefully run."

Lead is still one of the most dangerous air pollutants. "High levels of lead in the bloodstream cause blood pressure to rise in adults, which leads to heart disease," notes Mohamed Abdel-Hamid, professor of hygiene at Ain Shams University's Faculty of Medicine.

Children's IQ levels have decreased by about 4.25 points due to the effect of lead on the nervous system during the early stages of formation and due to women's exposure to lead," he continues.

"A single lead plumbing workshop releases lead fumes covering about half a kilometre in the direction of the wind — 50 times the allowed maximum level for 12 months. The concentration of lead particles outside the workshop can reach 5,730 micrograms per cubic metre, while international levels are set at 450 micrograms."



Ships that pass

I have always been fascinated by strangers — people to whom I have never spoken and never will. I suffer from fly-on-the-wall syndrome. Well aware of this weakness in my character, I have chosen to cultivate it rather than opt for costly treatment, and therefore have perfected the technique of capturing every word of conversations in which I have no part, without being noticed. This is not always an easy feat, but can be accomplished on condition that one maintains the detached, uninterested attitude of the neutral observer at all moments, no matter how spicy the tid-bits overheard.

Last week on the metro, I had a unique opportunity of tuning in to a conversation of which I was the sole subject. On this particular day, all seats were taken in the ladies' compartment, and I had to stand. A young girl, sitting next to where I was standing, nudged her companion, "Look at the woman," she said. "She is a foreigner." I looked around. All the women were wearing *higab* and none, by any stretch of the imagination, could be mistaken for a visitor to our shores. Then it dawned on me: I was the strange one. The girls looked indifferently entertained by my appearance. Not looking at them or at myself, I mentally checked what I was wearing. I had nothing on that could attract attention, I decided to read. "She has books," said the first girl, almost choking with laughter. "Do you think she still goes to school?" The other girl examined me critically. "Maybe she is trying to learn Arabic," she said finally. Both girls jumped up and down on their seats, shrieking and pinching each other. I could not follow the conversation, unfortunately, but I found out that the first girl was Mervat and the second answered to the name of Sabah. They were both wearing *higab* and very long skirts. Sabah was the prettier, with large brown eyes and a touch of make-up. She was also the boldest. Suddenly she rose and, staring me in the eyes, uttered a quick "what's your name," then collapsed on her seat in mirth. Mervat's mouth was half open, as if in encouragement for me to speak my name. I practiced my unconcerned look, which consists in trying to catch a glimpse of my forehead.

"She is German," ventured Mervat. "No," said Sabah, "she is American." Mervat was not convinced. If I were American, I should have understood their question and told them my name. She had once met an American lady who had spoken to her. She had come to Egypt to learn Arabic and had been happy to converse with Mervat. But Sabah was not going to be upstaged. She had seen American teachers riding on the metro several times "and they looked exactly like this woman." I was back in their field of vision. "Then this one is a teacher," said Mervat. Sabah looked at me once more, then shook her head. "She wears pants," she explained, "teachers only wear skirts." Mervat looked miffed. Sabah was contradicting her constantly. "That's not true," she said with a point of vehemence. "I know American teachers, they wear anything, they even go around naked." I hoped that my eyebrows were not rising in surprise of their own accord; I had heard many accusations levelled at American teachers but never, in all honesty, that they had been seen around in indecent get-up. Sabah was reflecting on this bit of insight into foreign mores. She got up and asked me in Arabic: "Do you go out naked?" I turned a page of my book. By this time several women in the compartment were looking at our little group and one of them remonstrated with the girls. "Foreigners are our visitors," she told them, "they are human beings exactly like us. Would you behave like that with your visitors at home?" This little speech had a calming effect. For the rest of the trip, the girls contented themselves with whispering together and casting me mocking glances every now and then. We were entering the station. I got off the train and they followed, soon overtaking me. They turned around and made faces. I decided that they needed to be taught a lesson. I caught up with them and grabbed each by a sleeve. "You should never assume that people you don't know don't know your language," I snarled. "This only proves your stupidity. And for your information, no teacher, American or otherwise, goes around naked. Shall we go to meet your parents? Maybe they can explain to me how you know these things?" Had I been a winged dragon, no more horrified surprise would have shown on their faces. They broke loose and ran for their lives. In their haste to get away, Mervat's skirts got caught in the turnstile; I watched her struggle madly to free herself. When I heard the telling rip, I snickered nastily: "Maybe American teachers are not the only ones who will be going around naked today." When I left them they were both searching their bags for a pin to repair the damage. I emerged from the station quite pleased with my ride.

Fayza Hassan

Sources of lead pollution in Egypt

A RECENT study carried out by USAID in Egypt revealed that: food in Cairo contains high levels of lead because crops cultivated near highways absorb lead from air and soil. Soil near factories contain a 16 times the percentage of lead found in any other type of soil. Crops transported in open vehicles are exposed to lead contamination. The lead used in sealing cans also adds to the problem. Cans containing fruit juices are especially dangerous because the acidity of the juice dissolves lead.

Water pollution by lead in Egypt ranges from 0.118 to 0.945 mg per litre, far higher than the allowed international limit, which ranges from 0.05 to 0.015 mg/litre.

There are 0.69-12.5 mg of lead per cubic metre of the air Egyptians breathe, also higher than international standards of 1.5 mg per cubic metre.

By 2000, it is estimated that four out of 10 people in developing countries will live in cities. While in 1990 there were 68 cities housing over three million people, by 2000 there will be 66 cities housing more than four million people; in 2025 there will be 135 such cities. These statistics do not augur well for the future of the air we breathe. Without determined efforts to control pollution, the smog of Victorian England may be reproduced worldwide. The effects on human health would be severe.

From *Saving Our Planet* (1992), by Mustafa Tolba, former executive director, United Nations Environmental Programme

Sufra Dayma

Bessara

Ingredients:
1/2 kilo crushed dry beans
4 medium onions (finely chopped)
1 tbsp. crushed garlic
1 bunch of fresh coriander (chopped)
1 tbsp. crushed dry mint
1 tbsp. crushed dry melothya
1 stalk of celery
Oil
Salt

Method:
Clear the beans of any dirt, wash well and cover with tap water in a container and leave to soak overnight. Strain it from this water, wash it once more and put it in a cooking pan. Cover with fresh water, add all the above ingredients except the salt and two of the four onions. Bring to boil, lower the heat, and leave covered to simmer without stirring. If it needs more water, add some boiling water and leave to cook until the beans are very well cooked and can be mashed by the tip of a fork. When it cools, blend in an electric blender and leave aside in one large serving bowl, or in separate small serving bowls. In a saute pan, heat some oil and fry the remaining two onions until they brown. Strain them from the oil then add them on top of the *bessara* bowls and serve with *baladi* bread and an assortment of pickles.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

An Indian summer

Asia House curries favour with Nigel Ryan

I confess to having a slight, very slight aversion to hotel restaurants. Beneath the decorative overlay, the soft carpeted luxury, all too often there lurks something very functional. Soft furnishings cannot quite disguise the institutional aspects of such operations. For some reason, though, this aversion does not include Asia House, at the Shepherd Hotel, which specialises in Indian food. Perhaps this is because the restaurant itself is small, surprisingly so, though at first you do not notice. The ceilings are high. The tables are well spaced. There is no sense of crowding and a great deal of the floor space is taken up with a marble fountain. Mirrors, placed neatly behind wooden lattice screens, further emphasise the illusion of space.

It is a very pleasant interior, though perhaps one could do without the piped, strangely orchestrated Eastern music. The tape they played the afternoon I lunched began quietly enough but ended like the 1812 overture. Crash crash crash, counterpointed by the trickle trickle of the fountain.

The menu is extensive, though not ludicrously so. The cooking, unlike the interior, tends towards the robust rather than the elegant, but is none the worse for that. As the 1812 overture came to an end, and Indian music seemingly rescored for the organ began to play, we ordered *sauz goshai*, curried lamb with spinach, *chawal*, plain basmati rice, dal and naan bread.

This is not a fast food joint, and it took some 15 minutes before the food actually began to arrive. Such a breathing space is nothing to carp about, since what it implies is that your

food is actually being cooked. And when it did arrive it was really quite delicious. The bread was sprinkled with black cumin. The *dal* was creamy without being overcooked. The lentils had been allowed to retain their texture, and had not been flooded with oil, as is so often the case. A nutty, slightly charred taste, which is how *dal* should be.

One gripe, perhaps, about the otherwise exemplary service. *Sauz goshai* was billed on the menu as lamb and spinach. When it arrived at the table, however, there was no spinach in sight. The dish itself was excellent. The lamb was cooked in a mild curry, onions and tomatoes, and the sauce had been thickened with lentils. But why, I wondered, had the waiter not let me know that there would be no spinach? It came as no surprise — spinach is, after all, out of season, and the chef at the Asia House does not strike me as a cook willing to substitute frozen vegetables for fresh. It would have been a simple matter to say sorry, there is no spinach. No reasonable customer would object.

The bill, for two people, which included a bottle of mineral water and soft drinks, came to LE105, which for cooking of this standard is really very reasonable indeed.

Asia House also has Chinese items on the menu, though I have always kept to things Indian when eating there. A comfortably elegant dining room, excellent food, efficient unobtrusive service and a bill at the end that does not involve taking out an overdraft. What more could you ask?

Asia House Shepherd Hotel, Garden City.

Al-Ahram Weekly

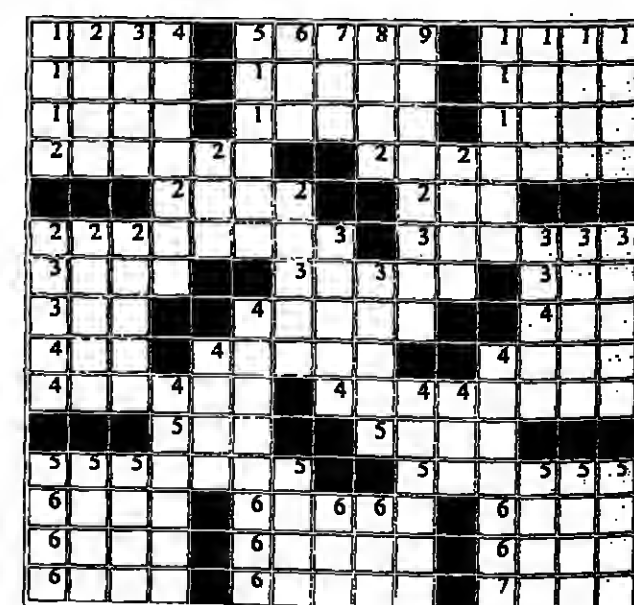
Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

Across

1. Anatomical fluid (4)
2. Portly; well rounded (5)
3. Smudges (4)
4. Arab country (4)
5. Sounds additional to normal respiration indicative of healthy lungs (5)
6. Wickedness (4)
7. Not characteristic of the upper class (4)
8. Supplementary (5)
9. Ice-cream holder (4)
10. Pusyfoots (6)
11. Huddled (7)
12. Ex-Yugoslav unifiler (4)
13. Of unsound mind (3)
14. Drone (5)
15. Polar lands' permanent top covering, hyp. wds. (6)
16. Pertaining to wings (4)
17. Shatter (5)
18. In the manner of (3)
19. Short for Timothy (3)
20. Person who believes in God (5)
21. Wear (4)
22. Abel's mother (3)
23. Ignorant persons (5)
24. Agitate; stay awake nights (4)
25. Train upset (6)
26. Ungeologic (8)
27. Describing some wines (3)
28. Pulled apart (4)
29. Network; lattice (7)
30. Squirrel-like lemur of Madagascar, hyp. wds (6)
31. Wheys (4)
32. Stone builder (5)
33. Nonsense, rubbish (4)
34. Presently (4)
35. Dodge (5)
36. Republic of Ireland (4)
37. Pause; heavy sleep (4)
38. Advised (5)
39. A European native (4)

DOWN
1. Coffers (4)
2. Press (4)
3. Avenue (4)
4. Circle equidistant from poles (7)
5. Quickly (6)
6. Slack (3)
7. Ultimo, abb. (3)
8. Pond (4)
9. What Biblical David is renowned as (8)



10. Decipher stereophonic signals (6)
11. Declare solemnly (4)
12. Flexible shoot (4)
13. Winter vehicle (4)
14. Equipment (3)
15. A family of German musicians and composers (4)
16. Attack (5)
17. Exposed (5)
18. Emblem of peace (5)
19. Nominator (5)
20. Discharges (5)
21. Nucleus; skeleton (5)
22. Genus of bitter herbs, pl. (5)
23. Trousers; throbs violently (5)
24. Useful quality (5)
25. Stringed instrument, prototype of piano (8)
26. Honey, Fr. (4)
27. Stripped a person of money (7)
28. Obliquely (6)
29. Advanced (6)
30. Young fish (3)
31. Russian tyrant (4)
32. Mr Coty (4)
33. God of love (4)
34. Preserve; rescue (4)
35. Diva's forte (4)
36. Tall story (4)
37. Duelling sword (4)
38. Despondent (3)
39. Ballad (3)

Memory recalled

Looking for rare books will soon be a less gruelling search if all goes according to plans...

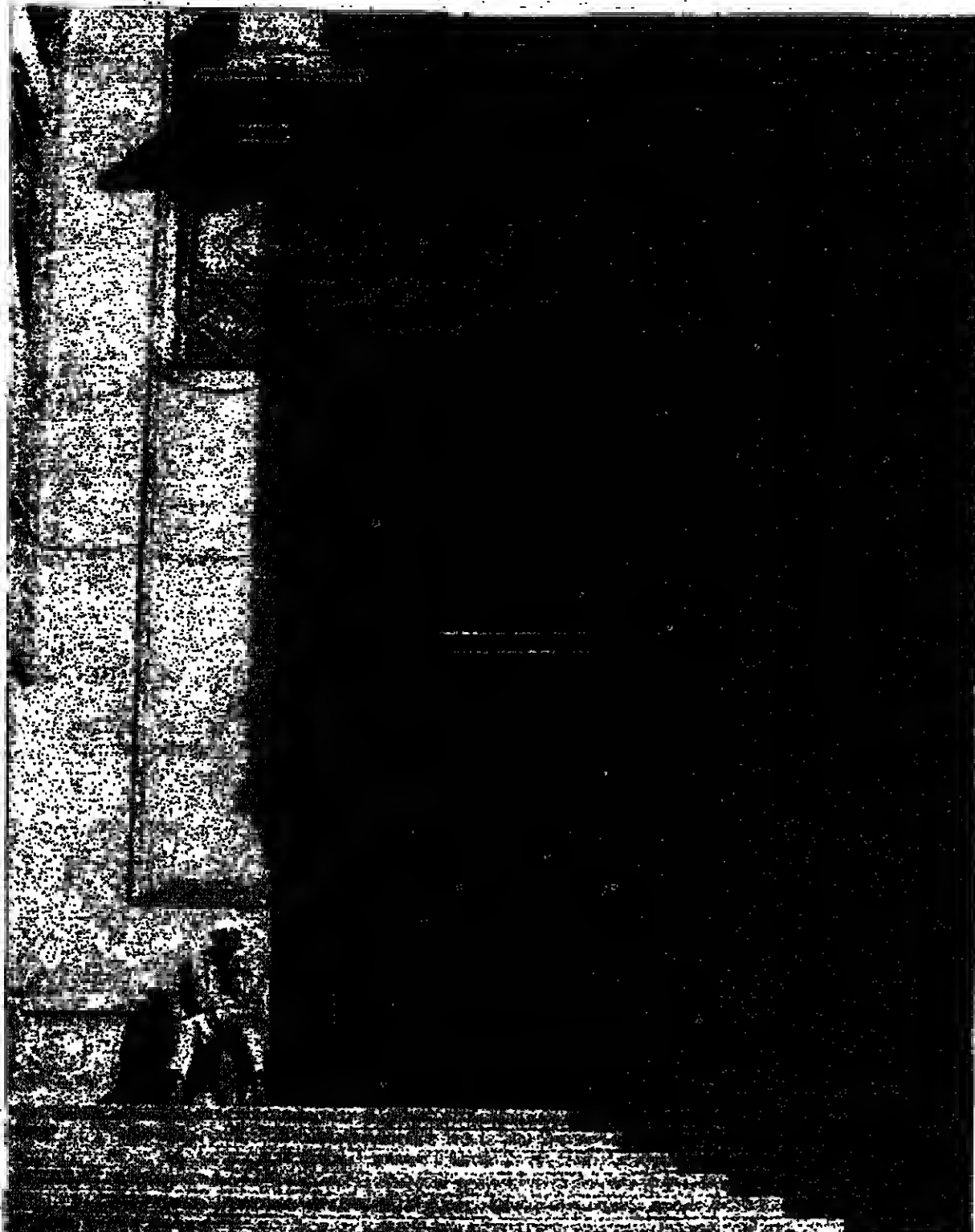


photo: Enad Abdel-Hadi

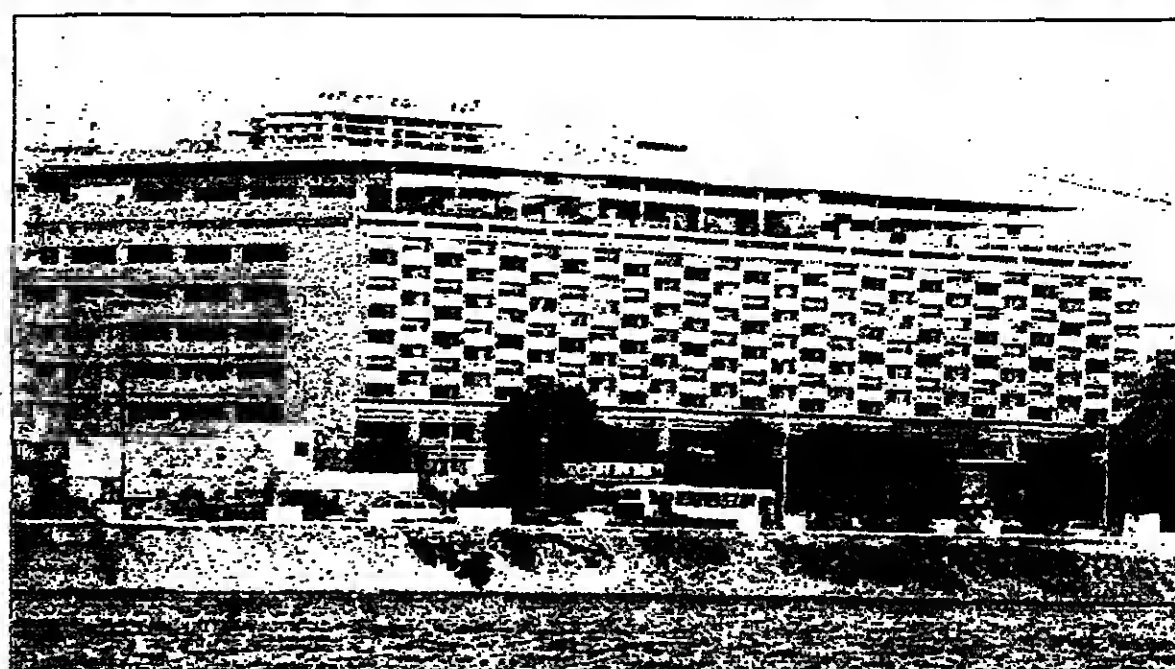


photo: Sherif Soudki



photo: Enad Abdel-Hadi

Dar Al-Kutub's historical base in Bab Al-Khalq (far left) and the current headquarters on Corniche El-Nil (above). Experts charge that extensive damage to the library's valuable stock of books, manuscripts and papyri (below) occurred when the Bab Al-Khalq collection was moved (left) to the Corniche El-Nil building



photo: Farid Hussein

Operation restoration

With digital technology bringing centuries-old manuscripts back to life, Rania Khallaf discovers a national project to revamp the region's oldest library

The wooden front door of the Dar Al-Kutub building in Bab Al-Khalq has been removed. Inside the furniture is gone and the shelves are empty. Workers shuffle around the site moving blocks of wood and piles of sand. In the midst of one of Cairo's most heavily-populated districts, the historical base of the nation's oldest library is undergoing intensive renovations.

This year Mrs Suzanne Mubarak initiated a multi-million dollar project to revamp Dar Al-Kutub, the first national library in the Middle East, built in 1870 by Khedive Ismail. Mrs Mubarak's plan began with a competition. In 1993, Egyptian architect Ahmed Mustafa Mino submitted his design for the renovation of the Bab Al-Khalq building. He won and received a LE120,000 prize.

The financing of the Dar Al-Kutub project is based on an innovative philosophy whereby a society of

trustees, who will operate as a non-governmental organisation, will be responsible for raising funds from the private sector, rather than the government as is the case with most national libraries. Known as the Higher Technical Consultant Committee for the Development of Dar Al-Kutub, the society will be chaired by Mrs Mubarak.

Based on recent estimates, the total cost for basic renovations at Bab Al-Khalq will be nearly LE40 million. Extras such as a car park will cost another LE20 million. Currently, the building is being evacuated for interior renovations. Plans include doubling the number of rooms inside and adding another floor.

In 1971 Dar Al-Kutub was affiliated to the national publishing house, the General Egyptian Book Organisation (GEBO). Bab Al-Khalq's stock of rare books and manuscripts was moved to a new building on Corniche El-Nil, which experts argue was unsuitable

for storing the valuable collection.

These documents may have been doomed to destruction if the Ministry of Culture had not decided to separate Dar Al-Kutub from GEBO in 1993. The decree established an independent organisation known as The General Organisation for Dar Al-Kutub and the National Archive, affiliated to the Ministry of Culture.

Under the new plan, Bab Al-Khalq will be allocated for Oriental studies, stocking 50,095 rare periodicals, manuscripts, and maps. Original manuscripts will only be used by scholars in order to avoid any further damage. But library readers will have the opportunity to review manuscripts on microfilm, microfiche and CD-ROMs.

Meanwhile, the Regional Information Technology and Software Engineering Centre (RITSEC) is heading the preservation project at the Corniche El-Nil

building. "Since there is no definite number of manuscripts, the first stage of the project is to compute the number of manuscripts and to start establishing a detailed database on each one," explained RITSEC's Dr Ahmed Nazif, the project's supervisor.

One of the many objectives of this project is to utilise multimedia computer technology to create a wide variety of software packages that illustrate selected manuscripts. Through computers, readers will be able to browse manuscripts on both CD-ROMs and video disks.

"Multimedia systems combine sound, text, graphics animation and video, giving users a chance to see and hear the past," said Zeinab Zaki, assistant director of the project. The computers will be connected to the Internet, whereby readers worldwide will be able to browse through the manuscripts on-line.

An important part of the project is developing a res-

toration centre which will retain and restore the organisation's rare acquisitions of maps, papyri and manuscripts. Officials state that the centre will be the largest in the Middle East. The Ministry of Culture in Spain will provide state-of-the-art equipment while the Cultural Development Fund (CDF) is financing the centre's infrastructure.

Sami Gharib, head of the CDF, emphasised that it is the responsibility of all cultural organisations to participate in supporting such projects with funds.

The centre will also work in conjunction with museums and national libraries in Gulf countries to help them restore their rare manuscripts. Reading halls will also be developed to facilitate up to 2,000 readers at once.

Meanwhile, Egypt and Germany have jointly established a centre for manuscript restoration and training courses for Dar Al-Kutub employees on how to preserve documents.

An empire of books

Priceless manuscripts thousands of years old are being restored at Dar Al-Kutub. Mariz Tadros gets a progress report from the chairman of the organisation of Dar Al-Kutub

Restoring the priceless collection of manuscripts, books and documents at Dar Al-Kutub is a daunting task. More than 3,000 papyri in Arabic, 500 rare documents, and over 60,000 manuscripts in Arabic, French, English and Italian reflect thousands of years of Egyptian heritage. The magnitude of the restoration and preservation project currently under way is unprecedented in the Arab World.

Dar Al-Kutub, the national library and archives, is almost an empire on its own. Its headquarters are located on Corniche El-Nil while its historical base is in Bab Al-Khalq. In addition there are several branch libraries spread throughout Cairo.

"We are only at the beginning," said Mahmoud Fahmy Hegazi, chairman of the The General Organisation for Dar Al-Kutub and the National Archive. According to Hegazi, the Dar Al-Kutub project aims firstly to preserve and secondly to restore all manuscripts and rare books before re-formatting them (by storing material on film or computer) so that the public has access to them but the risk of damage is minimal.

"Preservation is a new concept in Egyptian libraries. So far it has received very little attention.

There is, to some extent, a lack of experience in controlling storage conditions," Hegazi noted. "But within the next few days, modern equipment will be installed in the Corniche El-Nil building to control temperature levels and humidity in the government archives and manuscripts sections."

Hegazi also explained that employees will be attending special training courses given by Spanish experts on how to use modern equipment in preserving and maintaining stable conditions whilst handling the manuscripts. Some will even be sent to the National Library in Madrid for hands-on experience.

The restoration of damaged manuscripts is also a priority in the Dar Al-Kutub project. "Traditional

restoration techniques have been too slow and very inadequate; they can only restore 1,000-2,000 pages a year. At that rate, the 10 million pages in documents and manuscripts that need restoration would never be finished," explained Hegazi.

As part of an Egyptian-Spanish joint project to develop Dar Al-Kutub's restoration centre, the Spanish government has donated new equipment worth \$1 million. The equipment is due to arrive this September and will also be used for manuscript restoration in other libraries such as Al-Azhar library, which houses 30,000 manuscripts, university libraries which contain another 6,000 and the Coptic Museum in Cairo.

The restoration centre will be equipped with a special laboratory unit which examines the effects of Egypt's air pollution on old material and explores ways of preventing further damage.

At an international conference on methods of preservation and restoration, co-hosted by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture and ESSCO, a division of UNESCO in Cairo last May, Hegazi told participants, "About 18 per cent of the library items are at great risk. Work has been done on some manu-

scripts, rare books and periodicals, but no work has been done on the papyri collection."

There has been a great deal of criticism levelled at Dar Al-Kutub concerning the apparent negligence in past years. According to experts, public figures and Hegazi himself, the amalgamation of Dar Al-Kutub with the General Egyptian Book Organisation (GEBO), Egypt's publishing house, 25 years ago had disastrous consequences for the national library. This was exacerbated by the fact that there were no preservation policies or legislation to prevent theft. Hegazi noted that a new bill concerning the theft of manuscripts will be presented to the People's Assembly this year.

"I think the damage was mainly due to the transport of manuscripts from Bab Al-Khalq to the Corniche El-Nil building. The value of the manuscripts and documents was underestimated," Hegazi recalled.

So what happened to the books? There may be some truth to the rumour that "Forty years ago, people were selling priceless manuscripts as old books," said Hegazi. Is this what happened to Dar Al-Kutub's manuscripts? "Perhaps... perhaps," was Hegazi's resigned response.

Basement beginnings

Fayza Hassan remembers the birth of Dar Al-Kutub



The groundwork for establishing a public library in Egypt was laid in 1868, following the return of several Egyptian notables from their trip to the Exposition Universelle in Paris. Upon returning to Egypt, one of these individuals, Ali Mubarak, an accomplished administrator, teacher and engineer, was appointed Minister of Education and Minister of Public Works. He was also entrusted with the task of establishing a public library in Cairo similar to the one in Paris. It was at this point that the old Dar Al-Kutub or Kutubkhana began to take shape.

Mubarak began collecting volumes from around the city which had previously been kept in mosques, mansions, the libraries of government offices and the archives of the Ministry of Awqaf (Islamic endowments). In addition to the books, he scored Cairo in search of rare engineering and mathematical instruments and a number of maps with which he completed the first collection. The new library opened its doors on 24 September 1870.

The library was located in the basement of the Mustafa Fazi Palace in Darb Al-Gamamiz, in the heart of Cairo, which was purchased by Mubarak to serve as his offices and the home for the schools he began.

To supplement the newly-acquired collection, a foreign books section was begun when the Egyptian Association donated its collection to the library in 1873. Additionally, a continuous influx of books from

private donors, the most notable of which was that of Mustafa Fazi, Khedive Ismail's half-brother, streamed in. After his death in Istanbul in 1876, Fazi's library found its way onto the shelves of the Kutubkhana, adding to the existing collection another 3,458 rare books. Also added were collections from the Taymuriyah and the Zakariyah families, a stable collection of 8,929 manuscripts and printed volumes in Arabic, Oriental and European languages on history, law, linguistics and Shari'a (Islamic law), named after Ahmed Zaki, one of the great *ulema* (religious scholars). From then on, the library was the recipient of any valuable private collection or work of art whose owner wanted to ensure its safety following his death. As the library's collection swelled, by 1886, the basement of the palace was no longer sufficient to hold all the vol-

umes. The first floor, previously the domain of the Ministry of Education, was taken over by the library.

Heading the operation from its inception until World War I was a succession of five German Orientalists. The first Egyptian to take charge of the library was Ahmed Lutfi El-Sayyid, the spokesman for the Jariya-umma group and a theoretician. He was succeeded by a group of noted intellectuals, scientists, and writers such as Ahmed Rami, Kamal Amin, Yehiya Haggi and Tawfik El-Hakim.

By the end of the 19th century, the Kutubkhana was bursting at the seams, and with no more room to expand, a new library was built to accommodate the collection. The new building was constructed in Bab Al-Khalq, the first stone was laid in 1899, and the ribbon-cutting was in 1904. By then, the new Dar Al-Kutub was home to 54,000 books, manuscripts and periodicals.

The decades between World War I and World War II witnessed the birth of a new role for the Kutubkhana. Not only was it a repository for rare collections, but it emerged as a more dynamic institution seeking to amass works by young Egyptian and foreign writers and academics. As such, it was slowly becoming an important research centre.

Another change of location was in the cards for the Kutubkhana. On 23 July 1961, another ground-breaking ceremony was held, this time on the Corniche, where the new National Library was built and inaugurated by President Sadat in 1979.

of Dar Al-Kutub," he stated.

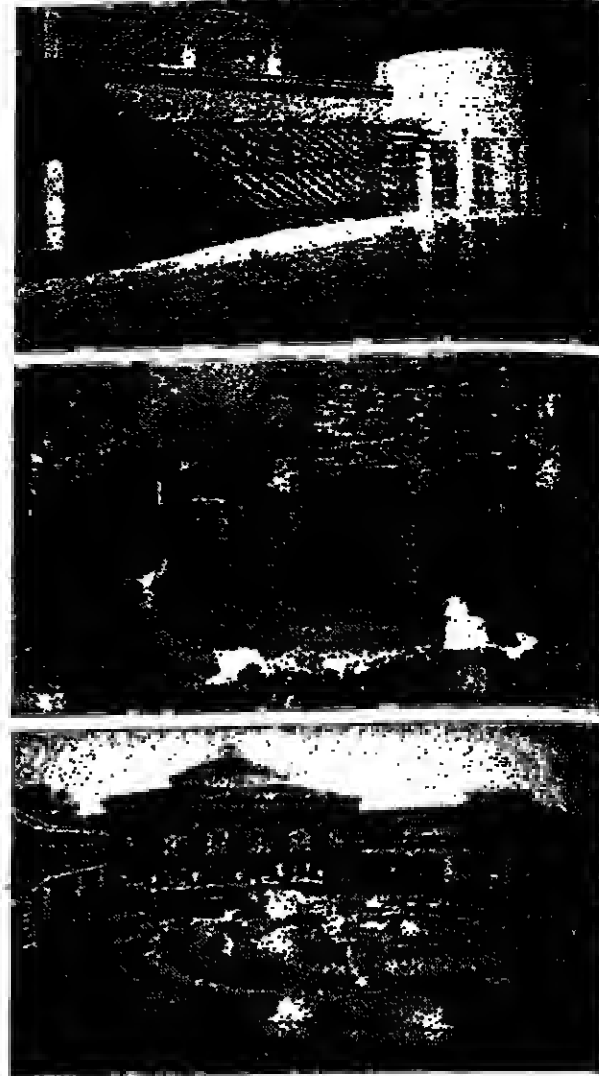
Today, "For the first time in 50 years, we have introduced sound cultural activities which are also being held in branch libraries. We are working in close cooperation with the Integrated Care Society to organise public lectures by prominent figures, exhibitions of papyri, books and periodicals, Arabic calligraphy, as well as theatre performances," he said.

Scheduled for inauguration in two months, the 15th May Library will be the second largest public library in Cairo housing some of the material in Bab Al-Khalq. The library will have a special floor for children's drama, music and literature.

The aim "is to confirm the future of the library as a social and cultural meeting point," Hegazi concluded.



At El-Gouna, natural assets abound in all shapes and sizes



The Blue El-Gouna

Need a little romance under the evening's raven-black hush or, time to reflect as your dreams divide on a point of fire. In either case, writes Tarek El-Tablawy, El-Gouna's the place to stay

How to get there

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet
Super Jet stations are located in Almatia (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 773-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almatia and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm, LE21 thereafter, from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almatia at 7.15pm. Tickets from Almatia LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matruh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almatia and Tahrir square. Tickets LE36.

Cairo-Sidi Abdel Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE33.
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almatia, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service at 6.45am, from Ramsis Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said at 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almatia. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almatia. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE30 each way.

East Delta Bus Company
Buses travel to North Sinai, South Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almatia and Tagmad Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbasiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almatia and Tagmad Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almatia and Tagmad Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almatia and Tagmad Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min, from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbasiya, then Almatia. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbasiya, then Almatia. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus
Stations at Tahrir and Almatia. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safage
Services 9am and 2pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Qusier
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 375-3553.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians; to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.

"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE31; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Tahiri" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 3pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE32; second class LE17.

"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir. Adly 390-9999; Opera 390-3444; or 1111 759-9906.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE300 for Egyptians, LE991 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE270 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE348 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE246 for Egyptians, LE321 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Sunny summer deals

Hotels

Here's a look at the special rates most hotels, especially resorts, are offering to Egyptians and foreign residents.

Hurghada
Helwan Regina Hurghada. LE120 per person in a double room including breakfast, dinner buffets and taxes. Valid until the end of the summer season.

Sharm El-Sheikh
Sharm El-Sheikh Marriott. LE240 for a single or double room including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.

Sharm El-Sheikh Mövenpick Hotel
LE200 for a single and LE250 for a double room in the front by the swimming pool. The hotel offers prices of LE260 for a single and LE300 for a double room in the back, or sports area. Prices include buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.

Travel agencies

Travel agencies are offering various packages both inside and outside Egypt this summer.

Flamingo Tours: A trip to Nice is LE2,850 for 8 days, Nice and London is LE3,490 for 13 days, Spain and Portugal is LE4,250 for 11 days, Athens and Rhodes is LE3,290 for 10 days, Paris and London is LE4,950 for 15 days, Rome, Florence, Venice is LE4,750 for 10 days and Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok is \$3,333 for 19 days. Prices for a special cruise around the Mediterranean in deluxe boats start from \$1,382 for 9 days.

Karnak Tours is organising trips to Marsa Matruh for 4 days in three star hotels on a half-board basis at prices starting from LE295. The company is also offering trips to Istanbul for 8 days at prices starting from LE1,450.

THERE ARE TIMES when too much of a good thing is just that — too much. Urbanites revel in the social and intellectual endorphin of the city, with its museums, galleries, concerts, restaurants and bistros. This is the dynamism that draws millions to places like Cairo, Tokyo and New York. But, after visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art one time shy of a baker's dozen, that kind of yuppie life-style begins to smack of the mundane and pretentious.

And so vacations were invented. When the stress of city-life begins to wear on the perves like a gaudious uncle in a family function, it's time to head for more exotic, tranquil locations like Cabo San Lucas, Key West or, a little closer to home, Hurghada and El-Gouna, a tourist village 25km south of Hurghada. The advantages of such locales is that while one has managed to escape from the rapaciousness that often accompanies city-life, the amenities, namely five-star hotels and a bustling, debauchery-packed nightlife, are plentiful.

FOR THIS, HURGHADA is ideal. Lining the city's coastline are numerous five-star hotels, such as the Hilton and the Sheraton, and pretentiously trendy bars that distinguish themselves from their ranchier counterparts by, as the singer George Strait would say, "attracting a better class of losers." Consequently, night time in Hurghada, is the right time. It is the time when thousands of tourists emerge from their rooms, after smearing their sun-burnt bodies with aloe, to go bar hopping and to feast on countless varieties of seafood cooked in more ways than an inmate of a federal penitentiary could think of to escape. Along with the usual nocturnal activities are strolling along the city's wide boulevards, shaking the sand out of your shoes and window shopping.

Sadly, it is these same inroads into the world of hedonism that detract from Hurghada's allure. It is, in short, its own worst enemy.

A little over a decade ago, this city was little more than a desert fishing village frequented only by Bedouins, fishermen and the occasional adventurous soul. But an ambitious nationwide economic reform programme aimed at boosting economic development and encouraging foreign investment in Egypt has helped pull cities like Hurghada and Sharm El-Sheikh out of the boondocks. With money and international hotel chains flooding in, they took on a ritzier air, attracting tourists in search of pristine beaches, vibrant coral reefs and prices that wouldn't even get you a cardboard box on the French Riviera, let alone a room in the Hilton.

As the number of hotels grew, so too did the number of seafood and pizza restaurants, bars, discos, dive centres and shops. To man these operations, thousands of Cairenes and Alexandrians relocated to the Red Sea coast. So numerous are they that it is rare to find anyone in the street who hails from the city or one of the neighbouring towns.

Still, a certain lacklustre quality prevails. One American tourist I met at a restaurant remarked, "This place reminds me of Atlantic City. Outside of the hotels, nothing has been done. It's still a wasteland of sorts."

Certainly, unequal development seems to have taken root in Hurghada. Venture a little further inland, into the town itself, for example, and the building are as architecturally pleasing to the eye

as the houses a child would build out of Lego blocks. What you are left with, then, is a grungy town which, once you venture away from the coast, boasts little more than the New Aquarium, a naval installation and a small international airport that is extremely useful for escaping from this tourist trap.

That's not to say that I have anything against hanging out in places where loud, gristly dressed people congregate to eat and drink in excess. This is what my family reunions are like. Why pay money for something I can suffer through for free. Better to head south, off the beaten tourist track, to an area where solitude and serenity reign supreme.

So, when I found myself lying by the El-Gouna Mövenpick Hotel's pool, absorbing as many rays of the bountiful Sol as I could without having my skin cells mutate, I knew that I had found a cow home away from home.

THERE'S A CERTAIN ENDOMORPHIC, visceral quality to solitude that makes it appealing. It is a chance to pamper yourself with the often much-needed introspection or, more likely, a reprieve from a nagging spouse or co-worker. In either case, it's just plain great — as are all self-indulgent activities. Nonetheless, even lounging by the pool, listening to Barry White sing about one of many conquests on the love train, his voice rolling in like thunder, I like the protagonist in F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, "set there brooding on the old, unknown world." What can I say, the retentive city-boy part of me is hard to put aside — even on holiday. After about 30 minutes, I felt that I had brooded enough about such universally-compelling questions like the meaning of life and how to embezzle a million dollars without being busted. So, I went for a stroll on the beach.

The sun, a gold doubleton, was sinking behind the horizon, and a cool breeze from the sea washed over me. Very relaxing, I thought to myself. Glancing over at the hotel from my vantage point on the beach, I was taken by how New Mexico-meets-Hassam Faty it looked. In the glow of the setting sun, the light peach-hued cluster of buildings that is the Mövenpick's guests rooms and restaurants, assumed a fiery shade of orange. The wind picked up and, what began as a light breeze, became a powerful gust of wind that displaced half the beach's sand onto my oil covered body. I had been transformed, for all practical purposes, into a piece of human sandpaper.

STANDING IN THE WATER, washing the sand off, I was approached by a young, amiable Australian.

"Beautiful, isn't it, mate."

I nod.

"I was here a few years ago," he said. "This entire area was nothing more than a desert plain. But even though the area has been developed, it's still leaps and bounds above those other tourist holes."

So far, at least two hotel companies, the Mövenpick and the Sonesta, have thought so. Where little more than desert stood not more than five or six years ago, is now home to two sprawling resorts, the architects of which had the good taste to design them with the surrounding environment in mind. In other words, no gaudy

high-rises of concrete and steel. Nestled alongside the beach, the nearly one dozen seashell pastel peach and pink-coloured buildings, the interiors of which are decorated in marble and fer-forge, blend into their surrounding environment. The paths are lined with small rocks; a waterfall splashes into a gurgling man-made stream and palm trees offer temporary relief from the harsh desert sun. Trying to get any closer to paradise would entail being buried six feet under the earth and then, there are no guarantees.

What truly sets El-Gouna apart from Hurghada is the tranquillity of the place. Barry White's crooning aside, the only sound to be heard is the lapping of the waves and the wind rustling the fronds of the palm trees. Not more than two metres off shore is the first in a series of small coral reefs, a microscopic representation of the marine wonders that rest, unspoiled, further out to sea. El-Gouna, and the resort areas already built, along with the chalets and other properties currently under construction, are still years away from reaching Hurghada and Sharm El-Sheikh's egregious commercialism.

THE SUN WAS A SLIVER of light on the horizon, the stifling heat had receded and I was getting tired of shaking the sand out of my shorts. Packing up my gear, I walked back, relishing in how romantic and cliché this picture-perfect scene could be if one chose to bring along their better half. A walk in the sunset, hands joined, gazing longingly into someone's eyes — and then realising that you left the oven on back home. Better to go stag.

In small groups of twos and threes along the coastline, guests of the hotel were dragging out the shore windsurfing boards, small kayaks, and in the case of one rather interesting looking gentleman, a big, yellow rubber ducky.

Heading back to the room, I came across a young couple obviously savouring the romance of the moment. From the snippets of the conversation I overheard as I strained to catch their words without drawing attention to myself, I discovered that they had just met, were from different countries and the Don Juan-want-to-be was helping expand his knowledge of Italian by encouraging bilateral cultural relations between himself and a pretty young Italian woman.

"How would you say in Italian, 'You are very beautiful'?"

Giggle.

"Really, your beauty is intoxicating. You are like an oasis of beauty."

More giggles, and then she blushes while smiling from ear to ear.

"Will you have dinner with me?"

Nod. Smile.

"I know that the stars will be jealous tonight."

"Why?"

"Because they will pale beside you, the most beautiful creature in the night."

Let's hear it for the silver-tongued devils of this world

who manage to make the cliché sound asinine, and the asinine, surreal.

LATER THAT EVENING, as I sat by the window of the hotel's seafood restaurant, knocking back as much food as my expense account would allow, I glimpsed a light flickering in the distance, and again was drawn back into the pages of *The Great Gatsby*. "I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock... Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter — tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further... And one fine morning..."

Through somewhat cynical, urbanised eyes, I had seen my holiday as a temporary escape from the better-skeller life of the city. But this area, so unexpected in the middle of a desert wasteland bordered by mountains, the sea and a run-down tourist town, was, in a very Aescopian way, much more than that. It was a visualisation of a dream. A place still so pure and untainted that even the young Don Juan's comments did not seem so cheesy (well, OK, maybe they did, but it was still one of the few locales that allows a solitary, cynical journalist to wax poetic). It did not matter that I was by myself, surrounded by desert and mountains. Nor did it matter that I was a mere hour by plane away from Africa's most populous city where stress was as much a part of the daily reality as haggling with cab drivers over the fare. What mattered was savouring the moment in much the same way that one would savour a fine wine (or *karade*, depending on your religious affiliation). Take a sip. Swallow. And then smile, knowing that the next sip will be as good, if not better than the last. The light had gone out over places like Hurghada long ago, but it was just beginning to shine here.

IN THE DISTANCE, a small cabin cruiser edged forward along the black horizon, a bow against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

EGYPT AIR

Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

Abu Simbel Sales Office:	32436-32435
Alexandria Office: Ramsi:	483357-483778
Gleem:	5865461-5865434
Airport Office:	4218464-427888-428237-428199
Aswan Office:	3150001/2/3/4
Airport Office:	48397-488508
Assiut Office:	323151-322711-324000-325407
Mansoura Office:	36378-363733
Hurghada Office:	443591/4
Airport Office:	44283-443597
Ismailia Office:	328937-221958-221951/2-328936
Luxor Office:	3885801/2/3/4
Airport Office:	388567/8
Luxor Office: Karnak:	382360
Marsa Matruh Office:	934398
Mesoufin Office (Sheikh El Koun):	233302-233523-233522
New Valley Office:	8887961895
Port Said Office:	224129-222878-228921
Port Said Office: Karnak:	238333-239970
Sharm El Sheikh Office:	600314-600409
Airport Office:	600408
Taba Office:	608530010-530011
Direct:	5783620
Tanta Office:	3117501/311780
Zakazik Office:	349829-349830/1

Elephantine spruced up

After years of extensive restoration, Elephantine Island will soon rank as Aswan's number one destination, Nevine El-Aref reports on the island's attractions

Elephantine Island is one of Upper Egypt's most interesting archaeological sites. Situated in the middle of the Nile at Aswan, the island has monuments dating from the 26th Dynasty. Its main temple was dedicated to the worship of Khnum, the god believed to guard the source of the Nile, and through the ages, other temples, tombs and monuments were added — a temple to Satis, the Sanctuary of Hehqt, ruins of ancient Jewish settlements, an ancient Nilometer and a reconstructed Nubian gateway.

Many of these monuments have recently undergone restoration, and the addition of a new museum has added still further to the island's attractions.

The new museum, consisting of three large exhibition rooms, a bookshop and a study room, will serve as an annex of the existing museum, according to Cornelius Vo Pilsgrum from the Dutch Institute of Archaeology. The new museum, he added, will display artefacts found by the German mission in the course of their excavations. The restoration work on the island's mon-

uments is part of a joint project between the Supreme Council for Antiquities (SCA) and the Dutch Institute. The project, Pilsgrum said, aimed at both preventing deterioration of the monuments, and excavating more of the island to reveal previously hidden treasures.

The most important work carried out on the island in recent years has been at the Sanctuary of Hehqt, an ancient Egyptian nobleman, and on the mud-brick houses of the Jewish settlers.

"To mark the limits of the reconstruction, especially in the Jewish houses, a line of shards has been inserted between the ancient and modern brickwork," explained Pilsgrum. Work was still in progress at other monuments, he added, and these sites remain closed to the public for the moment.

Abdel-Halim Nouredin, secretary-general of the SCA, said that visitors would soon be able to see the newly-restored ruins, symbol of the god Khnum. Inside these tombs is a large number of sarcophagi with mummified rams lying on top of them.

Also in the pipeline is an open air museum or architectural exhibition to be held at the site of the ancient town, due to open next year. Decorative blocks dating from the New Kingdom, including some from Khnum Temple, will be on display.

In order to take full advantage of the island, the SCA is to erect a large board showing a visitors' path around the island, taking in all the sites. New ticket prices for Elephantine Island are LE5 for foreigners and 50 piastres for Egyptians.

The SCA is also undertaking other work in the area. Neighbouring Seheil Island has been fenced off to protect its ancient engravings, and the road to the island has been paved. And Nouredin reported that the road between Aswan and Abu Simbel has been extended to reach the collection of Sebua temples, and work is continuing to provide access to the Anzida temples. This road, the result of collaboration between the SCA, the High Dam Authority and the Ministry of Tourism, will be officially opened in four months.

Hardly has the hoopla died down than the sporting world returns to Atlanta once again as the 1996 Paralympic Games are set to kick off. Racing on the heels of the Olympic Games, fans are sure to leap and soar as delegation members promise to perform swimmingly. Abeer Anwar takes the field

Not all that is gold glitters

Lion hearts

The Olympic city of Atlanta, which recently witnessed the greatest gathering of athletes in history, is set to receive some of the most determined athletes ever. With its Olympic Stadium and village, Atlanta will host delegations from 127 nations — more than participated in the Olympic Games in Mexico City — at the 1996 Paralympic Games.

The Egyptian Paralympic team will travel to the United States with a dual mission following the disappointing performance of the Egyptian Olympic team.

"We are not just competing to win medals or set new records. We have a more important mission, to show the whole world that Egyptian athletes are still here and can compete to win," declared Essam Zeidan of the swimming team.

The team members confidence isn't all bravado. It's backed by results. The 32-member strong delegation to the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games brought home an astounding 20 medals. Competing in five sporting events, the athletes captured seven gold, five silver and eight bronze medals.

Although they are competing in only three sports in this year's Games, the team promises to present Egypt with no less than 25 medals including at least 10 gold.

The squad enjoys the support of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports which provided the Handicapped Federation with the funding for Atlanta. "We asked for and were given LE1 million for preparation and LE750,000 for the expenses of participation and accommodation of our athletes in Atlanta," Hosam

El-Dia Mustafa, secretary of the Egyptian Handicapped Federation, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

The athletes, participating in the swimming, athletics and weightlifting events, underwent rigorous qualifications to compete in the Games. The process of choosing the Egyptian Paralympic team began four years ago when the federation began sponsoring a number of championships and trials. These events were scheduled routinely to allow for the evaluation of the athletes fitness to compete in the upcoming Games.

"Our team was unable to qualify in the basketball competition since we took second place behind Iraq in the African Qualifications," said Mustafa. "As for the volleyball team, although they qualified, we feel they will not achieve the third place minimum set by the federation," he added.

"Only the athletes whose standings are equal to those who won at least third place (the bronze) in the 1992 Barcelona Games are eligible," explained Nabil Salem, president of the Egyptian Handicapped Federation.

Egypt, it appears, has a rich pool of talented athletes on whom to call. "In spite of putting such stringent conditions for participation, many athletes qualified and the federation had a hard job choosing the best," added Salem.

To achieve their goal of getting the gold, the players have been training day and night at the Mandi Olympic Centre. "I think that they will be able to do what the Olympic team could not as they are dedicated and talented athletes," said Salem.

The hard road to Atlanta

THE AVERAGE person seldom takes the time to think of the everyday hardships faced by the physically-challenged. Two athletes preparing for the 1996 Paralympic Games spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly* about their concerns and the difficulties disabled athletes encounter just getting to and from their training facilities.

Of the many hindrances met with, the athletes reserve special mention not only for the lack of special pathways but also for the inadequacy of the public transport system to facilitate their movement throughout the city. As a result, some of the athletes must rely on taxis where they are often charged exorbitant fares.

"Just the act of getting a taxi to stop for me is a terrible ordeal," lamented swimmer Essam Zeidan. "Even if he agrees to take me, the driver often charges ten pounds to go a distance which normally costs just LE2. If I complain they insist that they are driving my wheelchair as well as me!"

The Egyptian Paralympic team has a number of players who live in governorates far from Cairo. The obstacles these athletes face travelling back and forth results in even greater tribulations. Not least of which is that because of their love of sport they must often remain absent from their families for months on end.

But, all this would be bearable if they were to receive their due recognition from their compatriots on the street and in the press.

Instead, as a result of ignorance, the physically-challenged are often insensitive eluded for the very confidence which sees them through each day.

"We are sometimes made fun of by people who say things like, 'How could you disabled ones even dream of going to Atlanta and achieving what the other athletes couldn't,'" said a bemused Mervat El-Sayed, of the athletics team.

Maybe the answer is because they can.



Essam Zeidan is to represent Egypt in six events in swimming and is expected to win at least three medals

Triumph of spirit

Baron Pierre de Coubertin's famous words, "The important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part. The important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle," gave eminent neurologist and neurosurgeon, Sir Ludwig Guttmann the inspiration for what was to become the Paralympic Games.

At the behest of the British government, German-born Guttmann established the Spinal Injuries Centre at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in 1944. England, in the midst of the second world war had great need for a specialised centre for the treatment of war wounded suffering from spinal injuries.

It was at Stoke Mandeville that Sir Ludwig was to introduce sports into the treatment and rehabilitation of paralysed patients.

Ludwig, nicknamed the 'De Coubertin of the paralysed', believed that participation in sports was essential to the development of mental attitudes necessary for social reintegration. His theory was to have a profound influence on the physical and mental well-being of his charges.

The success of his philosophy led Guttmann to organise the first Stoke Mandeville Games in 1948. With 16 competitors in archery from two teams — one from Stoke Mandeville Hospital and the other from the Star and Garter Home for the Disabled — few could have predicted a glowing future.

But it was only four years later that the Games took on an international aspect. In what was to become an annual gathering a small team of Dutch wheelchair-bound war veterans crossed the Channel to join their British comrades in the Games in 1952. The following years at Stoke Mandeville witnessed more and more countries competing in an ever increasing number of sports events.

Sir Ludwig's dream bore fruit in 1960 when the Games, now officially entitled the Paralympics, were held in Rome, host city of the Olympic Games. The Games had come of age with 400 physically-challenged athletes representing 23 countries joining in competition.

As the Paralympic movement grew, other classes of athletes joined to compete, including amputees, the blind and those with cerebral palsy.

This year's competitions, the fourth to be held parallel to the Olympic Games are the largest ever. Delegations from 127 nations will be treated to performances from Aethia Franklin, Carly Simon and a special greeting from guest of honour Christopher Reeve. The star of the Superman series of films was himself paralysed after being thrown from his horse in a jumping competition.

Egypt, under the auspices of the Egyptian Handicapped Federation (EHF), will be fielding a 32 member squad competing in swimming, athletics and weightlifting events.

The EHF, established in 1982, took over from the Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs as the body responsible to the athletes competing in the 1988 Seoul Paralympics. The Seoul Games witnessed the coming of Egypt's team as a power to be reckoned with, but it was at Barcelona '92 that the squad really excelled, bringing home 20 medals.

The 1996 Egyptian Paralympics delegation

Weightlifting:

Name: Ahmed Gom'a
Competition weight: 50kg
Previous achievements:
- Gold medal in the 1988 Seoul Paralympic Games

- Gold medal, Best Player Cup and world record in the 1990 World Championship
- Gold medal in the 1992 World Championship in France

- Gold medal and world record in his weight range in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games
- World record in the 1994 World Championship in Sweden
Expectations:
Gold medal and a new world record

Name: Emad Bahgat
Competition weight: 67.5kg
Previous achievements:
- Gold medal and world record in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games
- Gold medal in the 1994 Arab Championship in Syria
Expectations:
Gold medal and a new world record

Name: Abdel-Moneim Saleh
Competition weight: 75kg
Previous achievements:
- Gold medal in the 1993 African Championship in South Africa
- Gold medal in the 1994 Arab Championship in Syria
- Gold medal in the 1995 Arab Championship in Cairo
Expectations:
Gold medal

Name: Talast Mohamed
Competition weight: 48kg
Previous achievements:
- Gold medal in 1992 and '93 world championships
- Best Player Cup in the 1993 World Championship
- Bronze in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games
- Gold in the 1994 Arab Championship in Syria
Expectations:
Gold medal

Name: Mosad El-Eraqi
Competition weight: 82.5kg
Previous achievements:
- Bronze medal in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games
Expectations:
Silver medal

Name: Mustafa Fadloun
Competition weight: 90 kg
Previous achievements:
- Gold medal in the 1991 World Championship in France

- Gold medal in the 1993 African Championship in South Africa
- Gold medal in the 1994 Arab Championship in Syria
Expectations:
Silver medal in his first appearance in the Paralympic Games

Name: Metwally Mustafa
Competition weight: 60kg
Previous achievements:
Gold medal in the national championship and record in the 60kg weight category
Expectations:
Silver medal

Name: Sherif El Hussieni
Competition weight: 100kg
Previous achievements:
- Gold medal in the 1994 World Championship in France
- Gold medal in the 1993 African Championship in South Africa
Expectations:
Silver medal

Name: Mohamed Ismail
Competition weight: 52kg

in Cairo
Expectations:
Three gold medals and new world records

Name: Shabane El Khatib
Events: Shot put and javelin
Previous achievements:
- World record in the 1995 African Championship

- Silver and bronze medals in the 1994 Arab Championship
Expectations:
-Gold medal

Name: Hani Eisaa
Events: Shot put and discus throw
Previous achievements:
- Two Gold medals and world record in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games
- Two new records in the 1995 African Championship in the shot put and discus throw
- Gold medal in the 1994 Arab Championship in Tunis
Expectations:
- Two gold medals and new records in both events

- Bronze medal in 400m event in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games
- Gold in the 1993 World Championship in Germany
- Gold in the 1994 Arab Championship in Tunis
- Gold in the 1995 African Championship in Cairo
Expectations:
Three gold medals

Name: Ahmed Khairy
Events: Discus throw and javelin
Previous achievements:
- Gold medal and a new Olympic record in the javelin in the 1992 Barcelona Games
- Two gold medals in the discus throw and shot put
Expectations:
Two gold medals

Name: Mohamed Abdel-Qader
Event: Discus throw
Previous achievements:
- Gold in the discus and silver in the shot put in the 1995 African Championship
Expectations:
Gold medal

Previous achievements:
Two gold medals in the 1993 African Championship
- Gold in the 1993 World Championship in Germany
- Bronze medal in the 1994 World Championship and world record in the discus throw
Expectations:
One gold and one bronze medal

Name: Mohamed El-Sayed
Event: Discus throw
Previous achievements:
New member of the Paralympic team
Expectations:
Gold medal

Name: Karima Zaki
Events: Discus throw and shot put
Previous achievements:
- Gold in the 1995 World Championship
- Two gold medals in the 1993 African Championship
Expectations:
One gold and one silver medal

Name: Mervat El Sayed
Events: Shot put and discus throw
Previous achievements:

Name: Emad Salah
Events: Javelin and discus throw
Previous achievements:
New member of the Paralympic team
Expectations:
One silver and one bronze medal

Swimming:
Name: Omar Abdel-Latif
Events: 100m and 50m freestyle and 50m butterfly
Previous achievements:
In Barcelona '92:
- Gold medal in the 50m butterfly and a new record
- Bronze medal in the 50m freestyle
- Bronze medal in the 400m freestyle
Expectations:
Two gold and one bronze medal

Name: Emad Adel
Events: 200m freestyle, 50m butterfly and 100m breaststroke
Previous achievements:
- Two gold medals and world record in the 1993 World Championship in Malta
- One gold medal and one silver in the 1995 Arab Championship
Expectations:
One silver and one bronze medal

Name: Tarek Abbas
Events: 400m, 100m and 50m freestyle, 100m backstroke and 100m breaststroke
Previous achievements:
- Gold medal in the 1989 World Championship in America
- Bronze medal in 1993 World Championship in Malta
- Gold medal in 1995 World Championship in England
Expectations:
Two gold medals and a new world record in 100m freestyle.

Name: Essam Zeidan
Events: 200m, 100m and 50m freestyle, 50m backstroke and 50m butterfly
Previous achievements:
8th rank in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games in the 200m freestyle
Expectations:
One gold and one silver

Name: Walid Ahmed
Events: 100m and 50m freestyle and 50m butterfly
Previous achievements:
4th rank in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games in the 50m freestyle
Expectations:
One bronze medal

Edited by Inas Mazhar



Men's athletics team with their coaches



Khairi set a new Olympic record in Javelin in Barcelona



Women's athletics team

photos: Aref Saad El-Din

Previous achievements:
- Gold medal 1990 in the African Championship
- Gold medal 1993 in the Arab Championship
Expectations:
Silver medal

Athletics:
Name: Ahmed Antar
Events: Discus throw, javelin and shot put
Previous achievements:
- Three gold medals in the 1994 World Championship in Sweden
- World record in the shot put in the 1994 Arab Championship in Tunis and two silver in the discus throw and javelin
- Two world records, two gold medals and a silver in the 1994 African Championship

Name: Ashraf Gom'a
Events: Shot put, discus and javelin
Previous achievements:
- Three gold medals in the 1995 Arab Championship
Expectations:
Two silver and one bronze medals

Name: Ayman Mohamed
Events: Shot put and discus throw
Previous achievements:
- Two gold medals in the 1991 All Africa Games
- Silver medal in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games in the shot put
Expectations:
One gold and one silver

Name: Ahmed Hassan
Events: 100m, 200m and 400m
Previous achievements:

Name: Mohamed Said
Event: Javelin
Previous achievements:
- Silver medal in the 1992 Barcelona Paralympic Games
- Gold medal in the 1993 African Championship
- Bronze medal in the 1994 World Championship in Germany
Expectations:
One silver and one Bronze medal

Name: Gamal Nabih
Events: Discus throw and shot put
Previous achievements:
New member of the Paralympic team
Expectations:
One silver and one Bronze medal

Name: Hosam Eddin Mohamed
Events: Discus throw and shot put

-One silver and one bronze in the 1995 African Championship
Expectations:
One silver and one bronze

Name: Zakia Abdel Rahman
Events: Discus throw, javelin and shot put
Previous achievements:
Gold medal in the 1994 World Championship in the javelin throw
Expectations:
Two gold medals

Name: Sohair El Komi
Event: Shot put
Previous achievements:
Two silver in the 1994 World Championship in England
Expectations:
One gold medal

India celebrates its Independence Day

Text of the Indian president's message to the nation on the eve of Independence Day 1996

On the eve of our Independence Day, I have great pleasure in extending to you my warmest greetings and felicitations. This year, Independence Day marks the commencement of the fiftieth year after our regaining freedom. In the history of a nation as ancient as India, a span of this duration may not seem appreciable, but it is special to us who live through it, as a period of freedom — independence and national self-respect. Every moment of it is to be cherished and devoted to the task of realising the goals of freedom.

My comrades in the struggle would recall the intense yearning at that time for India's liberation from bondage. Innumerable sons and daughters of India gave up their lives, bravely and selflessly, fighting for the freedom and dignity of our nation. Sacrificing themselves in this great cause, they joined the glorious ranks of the immortals in our history. The struggle was long, arduous, challenging and heroic. At times massive punitive action was inflicted on us with such ferocity and ruthlessness that to many the vision of freedom seemed a distant and unattainable dream. India was after all regarded as the brightest and most valuable jewel in the crown of the mightiest empire ever on earth. The rulers of that time scoffed at us and asked us whether we really believed India would ever be free. And yet freedom was secured. This was a historic triumph of the human spirit. Steady, dedicated efforts by millions, inspired and guided by leaders of high moral and ethical stature, brought India out of the darkness of humiliation and servitude.

Two generations have grown since then and today freedom and independence are taken for granted as if these blessings have always existed, as if these are ordinary attributes of nationhood. It is important that all of us realise that neither freedom nor independence, let alone equality or justice, between nation and nation are bestowed by nature. These can be safeguarded, only by intense, vigilant, constant and unflinching effort — empowered by vision, unity and national commitment. Today as we enter the fiftieth year of freedom, we must be mindful of the modern imperatives of national freedom and independence.

Let us be aware that bondage comes in many forms. The subjugation and enslavement of nations and peoples for sinister ambitions — of

their assets, human and physical, no longer requires force of arms, physical occupation of territory, draconian laws, prisons across seas or shackles of iron. Indeed these instruments and techniques are long discarded as being outmoded, inefficient and counter-productive. Therefore, apart from the usual and obvious methods, such as titled terms of trade, and undermining self-reliance in economic growth, the focus now is on the mind of the nation and its people. The key and most sensitive elements determining national identity are the values and ideals of the nations, our foremost concerns as a people, our felt needs and priorities, our aspirations, the national atmosphere, the policies developed and the way in which the mechanisms and institutions of our national life function. We must be determined and ensure that we are not propelled by the agenda of others.

It is in these respects that we have to be fully cognisant, vigilant and purposeful. It is in these respects that we can generate a tremendous, vitalising force for advancement, growth, friendship, peace and the good of all. It is in these very respects that we must resolutely withstand and neutralise the formidable pressures manoeuvred against us.

It is a matter of great good fortune that we are uniquely endowed to do so. Our spiritual, intellectual and cultural heritage is of universalism. The core values and ideals of the great religions and philosophies that have flourished in India are one of oneness, harmony, equality, justice, compassion, service, truth and non-violence. Concern for the well-being of all, mutual respect for each other's viewpoints, the spirit of cooperation and friendship and sharing, the yearning to relieve the suffering of all living things, the aspiration to build peace — true peace, not just the absence of war — all these positive aspects go into the identity of all of us as citizens of this great country. These virtues sustain India, account for the continuity of our ancient civilization as well as our receptivity to all things wholesome and beneficial, our national characteristic of assimilation, diversity, synthesis, pluralism and harmony. These virtues of universalism gave our struggle for freedom its unique and classic quality. The struggle was waged and the suffering undergone not for the freedom of in-



President of India Dr. B. V. Narayana Murthy

dia alone, but as a global movement for the emancipation of the subjugated, the oppressed, the down-trodden all over the world. This spirit of universalism was expressed in the very first moments of independence when we declared that peace is indivisible, so also is freedom, so also is prosperity — thus announcing to the world India's recognition that these great boons are not truly realised so long as any part of humanity continues to suffer. Every member of the Constituent Assembly of India had pledged to work for the well-being of all humankind. It is such a perspective which energised India's policy of non-alignment and India's quest for peace, development and disarmament. It is precisely this approach, in tune with core national values and ideals, that vitalises our system of democracy and accounts for its inner strength, growth and effectiveness.

Friends, the recently concluded general elections afforded further proof as to the efficacy, maturity and resilience of our democracy. With faith in democracy, the electorate in Jammu and Kashmir boldly withstood the machinations of sinister forces of violence. The smooth transition of power from

one government to another and the working of the parliamentary form of governance has been a matter of admiration. Although no party had the majority in the Lok Sabha, coalitions were soon formed and tested on the floor of the house. Despite a wide range of parties in the Lok Sabha the election of the speaker was unanimous and respecting a convention the deputy speaker was also elected unanimously. With the election for the constitution of the eleventh Lok Sabha, and the formation of the council of ministers, India has again demonstrated her expertise and mastery of the processes of the parliamentary form of democratic governance. The immense scale of general elections in the world's largest democracy, peaceful and fair polling, the measured progress of constitutional processes for change and installation of governments rebound to the credit of our country.

A new chapter has opened in the history of Federal governance. There are governments now with different political parties in various states and at the centre the federal apparatus has smoothly adjusted to these developments. It would be heartening to see in inter-state matters, an approach of constructive consultation for mutual resolution of many problems — including, particularly, sensitive issues of sharing and utilising scarce resources such as water and power. Many a problem that may appear intractable and daunting can be resolved by the democratic approach of discussion and mutual accommodation. Such instances enrich our democratic experience and set examples for emulation in other spheres.

It is essential now at this juncture of our political development to devote ourselves also to concerted action vis-à-vis social inequities, unjust structures, ideas and practices that beset and weaken our nation. We have availed humanitarian heritage of thought reflected in our constitution and in many laws. What is required urgently is the building of a nation-wide social awareness and consensus, a powerful movement for social reform which can give real and practical effect to the rights and safeguards enshrined in the constitution and the laws. There has to be wider reception that justice is not done merely by the application of laws but by social change and transformation. What matters is the way the community responds against injustice, violence and deprivation. Com-

From India: Mohamed Youssef Hattab

munity sensitivity to social reality has to be heightened. This is a task of profound importance. The role of the judiciary, social activists, the press and the media will be crucial. Parliamentarians, legislators and the representatives of the people must be in the forefront of this task, but there is scope, and a crying need for contributions by all citizens in such a movement for social change and reform. I would appeal to all patriotic citizens, particularly the youth, who have always been in the vanguard of progressive action to take up this challenge.

I should add that without social reform and transformation, no tangible and meaningful progress can be made. We have to do away with the distortions, the disparities and inequalities in our social structure that block the path to future growth in all spheres.

The great prospects and challenges ahead call for a resolute effort by all — the Kisan, the Jaman, and Mazdoor and by every member of our polity. All must actively participate with a new sense of mission. The women of India particularly must attain their due position as equal partners in every sector of nation-building activity. The greatest democracy in the world must prove itself as a powerful social, economic and political partnership striving for universal values and ideals that our nation has always upheld before the world.

Friends, as we endeavour, to build the future of our nation, we also reiterate to our neighbourhood and to the rest of the world our message of peace, friendship and cooperation. We believe that concerted efforts to promote mutually beneficial regional cooperation between nations of the SAARC, in the Indian Ocean region and with nations of the ASEAN, would open the path to higher levels of development prosperity and happiness for all. We shall continue to play a vigilant and creative role in world affairs.

Tomorrow, on our Independence Day, when we unfurl the national tri-colour, let us salute our flag of freedom, reiterate our national resolve and rededicate ourselves to the glory of our nation, our people and to the good of all humankind.

Egyptian-Indian relations

Egypt and India have had the most ancient civilizations ever known to history; their monuments are a testimony to their greatness, enlightenment, wisdom and knowledge of their constructors.

In Indian legends, Egypt was named Mishra, which means wisdom, similar to that of the Arabic name for Egypt, Misr, for all the merchants who visited Egypt in ancient times came back talking about this ancient civilization, its culture and its people.

Throughout the course of history, Egypt and India continued to act together, but this time for independence. In 1928 the Indian Congress, headed by Mahatma Gandhi, issued a decree fully supporting the struggle of the Egyptian people against British occupation. After the Indian Independence on 15 August 1947, the Egyptian revolution took place on 23 July 1952. The two heads of state Jawaharlal Nehru and Gamal Abdel-Nasser met with president of former Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito to share a common vision of their roles and historical commitment in liberating Third World countries from the yoke of colonialism. The three heads of state formed an international assembly which includes these nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, with the intent of moving away from the terrors of the Cold War. Together, both countries cooperated in many achievements.

Now, in 1996, India is celebrating its golden anniversary of independence. The journey was arduous, yet full of enthusiasm and determination. Both countries have achieved a historical dynamism which is reflected on their regional and international status in establishing their responsibility towards realising security, stability, and peace in both regions in the world.

As ambassador of Egypt, I can only express to the Republic of India my sincere admiration, appreciation, and encouragement for the nation which serves its countrymen. A nation that achieved democracy, a united goal and destiny to its people, in order to continue their march towards increasing the open-door policy and economic reform just as the Egyptian people have, with the hope of building a better tomorrow.

A heart-felt congratulations from the Egyptian people to the Indian people on their fiftieth anniversary of independence. We hope to increase relations, fraternal, political and economic, supported by the wisdom and determination of the noble leadership of Egypt and India. Clearly, these two countries are bound by their ancient historical ties, and will strive together to build a brighter future for its peoples.



Vice-President K.R. NARAYAN and his wife Usha Narayan, the guest of honour at the Egyptian Embassy in New Delhi, celebrating the 44th anniversary of the 23 July Revolution. In the centre is Egyptian ambassador to India.

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form to various international standards are finding acceptance in the international markets also.

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Ambassador's message

15 AUGUST is India's Independence Day. It is a day when Indians everywhere recall with pride and emotion the long struggle for freedom led by Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation. This struggle was unique as it was inspired by the principles of non-violence and truth, means never used earlier in the history of mankind to obtain freedom for a people from imperial rule.

India and Egypt have much in common as ancient civilizations and much in common as modern countries too. The freedom movements in the two countries this century drew from each other's experience as borne out by the personal contacts between Saad Zaghloul and Mahatma Gandhi. This was followed in the post-independence era, by an exceptional rapport between President Gamal Abdel-Nasser and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the two pillars of the Non-Aligned Movement. The legacy of the Indo-Egyptian friendship left behind by these two leaders is rich and diverse. This friendship is not only at the government level, it is deeply rooted in the sentiments of the people of the two countries.

Faced with major changes in the international situation, the two countries are now engaged in the process of giving new substance and direction to their mutual relations. Former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's visit to Cairo in October of last year was aimed at strengthening bilateral economic and commercial ties, scientific and technological cooperation and media exchanges between India and Egypt. Combating international terrorism is becoming a priority concern: India and Egypt have agreed to cooperate in this. The challenges facing developing

countries, whether political or economic, require to be collectively addressed and that is why both countries are committed to the revitalisation of the Non-Aligned Movement with a revised agenda.

New and exciting economic opportunities are opening up with the commencement of economic reforms in both countries in the same year, in 1991. Significantly, Indian firms have started investing in Egypt and 23 Indo-Egyptian joint ventures have already been approved by the Egyptian authorities. The Indo-Egyptian Joint Commission which is expected to meet in the near future should give a major boost to our economic ties.

Indo-Egyptian relations are strong because our friendship is disinterested and is based on genuine mutual esteem, complete equality and respect for each other's sovereignty. Neither country seeks to shape the political or economic agenda of the other. Our respective experience in dealing with complex societies rooted in a deep historical past is another bond, as is the quality of moderation and measure of our policies that we share. On India's Independence Day it is appropriate to recall all that binds our two countries together.

I express my sincere appreciation to Al-Ahram for having brought out, as in the past, this excellent supplement on India to commemorate this auspicious day.



Kamil Sibal, Ambassador of India

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Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

At precisely 11.13am on Friday 17 November, *Al-Ahram's* editor-in-chief dispatched a special telegram to the head-quarters in Cairo. He was writing from Port Said where he was attending the unveiling ceremonies for the statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps. It was a report of some importance, and it is interesting to share it with *Al-Ahram's* readers who read it the following day.

The ceremonies began at 9.00am with a 21-gun salute hailing the arrival of His Royal Highness the Khedive. In an eloquent opening speech, the Khedive paid homage to de Lesseps for his magnificent accomplishment, which the Khedive described as the realisation of a dream that merits the tribute of all mankind. He then expressed his gratitude to the Suez Canal Company for commissioning the statue and for having invited him to this ceremony, providing him the opportunity to express the great esteem he cherishes for de Lesseps.

After concluding his speech, the Khedive unveiled the statue amidst the expressions of delight of all. Then Prince Dranberg, the president of the Suez Canal Company, addressed the audience. After paying tribute to His Royal Highness and his noble ancestors, he said that the canal is a public international waterway which shall be preserved and safeguarded by all the countries of Europe. He then gave a brief history of the administration of the canal from its inception to the present day.

This speech was followed by that of the internationally reputed writer and member of the Académie Française, de Fouquet, who extolled de Lesseps for his breadth of knowledge and expertise as an engineer, a scientist and a geographer. Then Count Charles de Lesseps rose to address the audience. After expressing his veneration for the Khedive and lauding the deeds of his glorious ancestors, he expressed his gratitude to the Suez Canal Company for the honour and tribute it had paid to his father. This was the concluding speech of the ceremonies, which ended at 10.30am.

The statue itself inspires awe and veneration. It offers a perfect likeness to its subject. Approximately 5,000 spectators attended the unveiling ceremony and at least another 1,000 were standing outside. Although these are the concluding comments of Tagla's report, the story of the statue does not end here. Indeed, it began in the pages of *Al-Ahram* some five years previously.

On 7 December 1894, in his chateau, La Chamaie, in central France, Ferdinand de Lesseps passed away, having almost reached the age of 90. Having been born in 1803, he had almost seen the entire 19th century in its fulfurl.

While de Lesseps is primarily associated with the construction of Egypt's famous international waterway, by no means was this his only feat. He also initiated the digging of the Panama Canal, a project that eventually brought him a five-year prison sentence. And although the French authorities

suspended implementation of the sentence out of consideration for his advanced age (88 at the time), this dark stain would tarnish his memory when the Egyptians sought to commemorate him.

Al-Ahram greeted de Lesseps' death with unusual coolness, which contrasted with its general enthusiasm for things French. However, it is a coolness that is summed up in the commentary's concluding assessment: "If we put the advantages of the canal to one cup of the scale and the disadvantages in the other we would find that they would balance out, and perhaps incline more toward the unfavourable in the minds of a large party of politicians, experts and men of peace." The attitude also explains the offhand reaction to the news that began to emanate from Port Said several weeks after de Lesseps' death of the creation of a committee composed of prominent city and canal officials — all of whom were foreigners of course — with the purpose of commissioning a commemorative statue to be situated at the northern entrance to the canal. One also suspects that at least an element of resentment lay behind some of the obstacles the Egyptian government attempted to throw in the way of this project. On 24 April 1895, for example, we read in *Al-Ahram* that the Egyptian government stipulated as a condition for licensing the statue "that it be erected at the entrance to the street bearing the name of the deceased". We also read that the unveiling ceremony "will be postponed for an unspecified period of time".

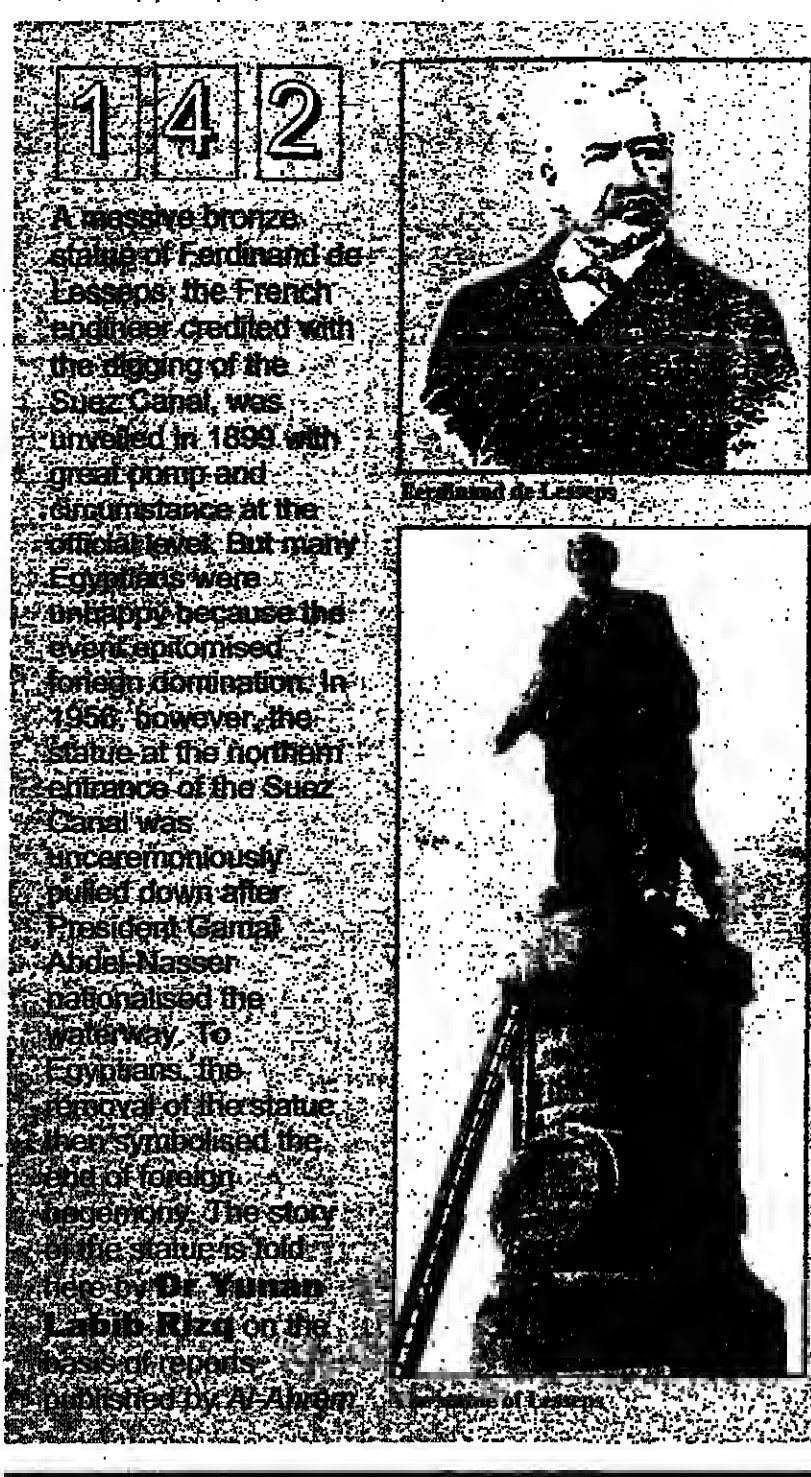
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs soon backed down, apparently under British pressure, and permission was granted to go ahead with the statue as planned. As *Al-Ahram* reports, "The honourable governor of Port Said presented the permit to the chairman of the committee so that he may proceed in accordance with it."

It was not until four years later that we learn further news, when, on 3 February 1899, *Al-Ahram* reports, "A large statue has been built in Paris... It will be displayed first in the portrait and statue museum in Paris before being transported to Port Said."

The sculpture was made of cast bronze and weighed 17,000 kilograms. For some reason, perhaps to receive British approval, it made a slight detour to England on its way to Egypt, arriving in Port Said on 3 October. There it would remain another month and a half as preparations got under way to celebrate its unveiling.

As *Al-Ahram* reports on 12 October, "The large French fleet has headed for the Orient and is due to arrive in Port Said to time for the ceremonies in commemoration of de Lesseps."

In his memoirs, palace confidante Ahmed Shafiq denies that the question of Egyptian representation in the ceremony was a subject of controversy. He wrote that while travelling abroad, the Khedive had received an invitation from the committee to sponsor and attend the celebration and that



he accepted. *Al-Ahram* accounts on the other hand offer a conflicting version. According to the newspaper, the committee originally intended to restrict the level of Egyptian representation to Hussein Bek Wasif, the governor of the Canal Zone. Wasif promptly travelled to Cairo to consult with officials there over his participation. Two days later, the Egyptian government granted a request by the committee to raise the level of representation to the ministerial level. It would be another week before other ruffled feathers were smoothed down. This was when Khedive Abbas II finally consented to attend the celebrations at the head of his cabinet.

Now that the major impediments were cleared, the organisers had to turn to the details of the programme and the reception of the visitors. The first person scheduled to arrive was Prince Dranberg, the president of the board of directors of the Suez Canal Company in Paris. He would be accompanied by the operations director of the company and together they would oversee "the final preparations for receiving His Royal Highness the Khedive and the other guests".

The foreign guests comprised several categories: official personalities, prominent European figures and European expatriates in Egypt. Some 150 guests were invited. Scheduled to depart by ship from Marseille on 11 November, *Al-Ahram* noted that "among them are a number of editors representing France's major newspapers". International media coverage was assured. The foreign residents in Egypt who would attend also comprised a number of press officials, notably Bishara Tagla who provided *Al-Ahram's* readers with his itinerary.

Al-Ahram noted that some members of the royal family had sent their regrets for their inability to attend. These included Prince Mohamed Ali and Prince Gamil Tus. Although the newspaper offered no explanation for this, it may well be a manifestation of the disapproval with which large sectors of the Egyptian public viewed the occasion.

The newspaper also observed that the members of the board of directors of the Suez Canal Company "have very kindly and generously issued personal letters of invitation and offered to arrange the transportation of their guests at their own expense". These costs were by no means paltry. According to *Al-Ahram's* estimates, it cost 5,000 pounds alone to rent the ship upon which some of the guests would travel, not to mention the various banquets and spectacles they would host.

Apart from the unveiling ceremony itself, the programme for the occasion included several other events planned for the guests arriving from abroad. Once the statue had been unveiled, the guests who had arrived on the Andus steamship would travel through the Suez Canal to the Red Sea and then return once more through the canal on their homeward voyage. Indeed, on 22 November, *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Suez was on hand to cover the passage of the steamer. He wrote, "The city of Suez was brightly decorated and festivities were organised to greet the arrival of the visitors. They were met by the director of the company and the family of de Lesseps who hosted for them a splendid banquet. After all were well sated with food and drink, the guests were treated to a spectacular dance performance. Then, at midnight, they partook once more of a buffet offering a sumptuous array of food and drink and the revelries continued until sunrise."

Other visitors, of course, would want to visit Cairo. For them the officials in charge of the festivities arranged a special train to

transport them to the capital. On 18 November, they were put on board a specially arranged train that took them to Alexandria where they boarded the ship bound back to Marseille. There remains a final segment of the programme: an invitation from the Khedive Abbas to the family of de Lesseps and the Suez Canal Company directors "to have lunch at the table of His Royal Highness" and the return invitation by the Suez Canal Company to the Khedive to "an honorary dinner this same evening and a dance programme".

Bishara Tagla himself was present at the banquet hosted by the Suez Canal Company that evening. We will leave it to him, therefore, to describe the opulence of the affair. "The banquet offered a sumptuous array of food and the champagne flowed in rivers. The banquet lasted until 9.00pm at which point the guests moved down especially constructed broad corridors to take them aboard the Andus for the evening's entertainment. The programme opened with the royal anthem. The entertainment continued until midnight at which point the doors were opened to the banquet hall."

Unlike others who may have been distracted by the dazzling munificence of the festivities, *Al-Ahram* did not lose sight of the greater issues. The day after the celebration, *Al-Ahram* took the occasion to remind its readers of the controversy over the canal. "There are those who say that it has benefited Egypt commercially, scientifically and morally, making it the link between the East and West and rendering the country of incomparable importance. Others, however, are of the view that it has brought the British occupation upon us, which is an evil that far outweighs the other benefits."

A second occasion is remarkable for its poignancy. Commenting on the unveiling of the statue, Tagla notes, "This event reminds us of the occasion when the subject of the statue himself inaugurated the canal 30 years ago. On that occasion, Khedive Ismail had hosted the kings and princes of Europe. Today, however, the hosts are the shareholders in the canal and the entrepreneurs and money magnates who have become the kings of this age. One mourns the loss of that day when Egypt was still independent and in full possession of its rights as one observes how the foreigner has come to play host in our country and indeed owns the reins of its political and financial management."

These sentiments persisted in the hearts of the Egyptian people when, in 1956, they uprooted the statue of de Lesseps, after the nationalisation of the canal, feeling at the same time that they were uprooting a symbol of exploitation, subjugation and degradation.

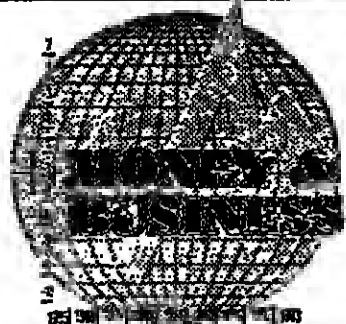
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Crisis management

UNDER the direction of Atef Obek, minister of the public works sector, the First Annual Conference for Crisis and Disaster Management will be held from 12-13 October 1996 at Ain Shams University. Rashad El-Hamawi, manager of the Crisis Research Unit of the Faculty of Commerce, Ain Shams University, said the conference aims at increasing awareness of the need to develop the managerial skills necessary to deal with crises and disasters effectively.

MONEY & BUSINESS



Tendence '96

PETER Goepfrich, executive manager of the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce, explained that the international exhibition for consumer goods and household appliances, Tendence '96, to be held from 24-28 August in Frankfurt, will include more than 5100 companies from all corners of the world exhibiting their products. The exhibition will be divided into three sections: table decoration and kitchen, household lighting and fixtures and gifts. The chamber is offering all its services for representatives of Egyptian companies wishing to attend the exhibition.

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The bank established and holds shares in a number of companies and projects within vital economic sectors. The number of companies of the bank equaled 38 at the end of 1418AH. The capitals of these companies have a value of LE409mn and \$593.5mn. Of this, the bank has a share of LE129.9mn and \$43.7mn in the capitals of these companies.

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- Misir International Hospital (Dokki, Giza).
- Monsoura Medical Centre, Monsoura.
- The Islamic Company for Engineering (FedCo), 10 Ramadan City.
- The Islamic Company for Acrylic Production, 10 Ramadan City.
- The Islamic Company for Industrial Cleaners, Burg Al-Arab.
- The Islamic Company for Animal Products, El-Qanater El-Kheir.
- The National Ismailiya Company for Foodstuffs (FoodCo), El-Ferdan, Ismailiya.
- Giza Company for Agricultural Industries (Comation), Zawia Abu Muslim, Abu Nijras, Giza.
- The Islamic Company for Land Production (Rocket Egypt), 6 October City.
- Mona Nursery (Dokki, Giza).
- Giza Company for Chemical Industries, 6 October City.

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EMIRATES is the first commercial airline in the world to have equipped its entire fleet with inflight telephones and fax machines, according to Satellite Aircom, a major consortium and service provider of satellite telecommunications facilities to airlines worldwide.

Emirates, which commenced the project in 1993, is also the first airline to have introduced telecommunications in Airbus aircraft. Specifications for the Airbus satcom were drawn up by Emirates' engineering team and coordinated with Airbus Industrie, USA's Honeywell Inc, UK's GEC Marconi and France's Dassault.

By the end of 1995, Emirates had successfully refitted all 16 Airbus aircraft with inflight telephones, and this year, with fax machines as well.

The airlines' Boeing 777 aircraft, the first of which joined the fleet in June this year, are each equipped with inflight telephones in all passenger seats in addition to two cordless telephones sets in each cabin and a fax machine on board.

Today, Emirates is the first commercial airline with a 100 per cent satcom fitted fleet with telephones and fax machines on every aircraft.

Maunce Flanagan, Emirates' Group Managing Director, said: "Emirates has always emphasised innovative inflight service. That was why, in 1993, when nobody else had developed a way to introduce inflight phones in Airbus aircraft, Emirates decided to pioneer the project and hence, developed the prototype."

"Today, we have another milestone achievement as the first airline in the world with a full fleet completely equipped with inflight phone and fax."

Emirates, charges for inflight telecommunications, at US\$7 per minute, are among the lowest in the world by a commercial airline for air-to-ground transmissions in international airspace.

Apart from the inflight telecommunications, Emirates is also the first airline in the world with a full fleet equipped with personal video systems in all passenger seats, including those in the Economy cabins.

Winner of over 100 international awards, Emirates now flies to 40 destinations around the world, with a fleet of 16 Airbus and two Boeing 777 aircraft. Another five Boeing 777 aircraft will join the fleet from October this year to the end of 1997.

Al-Sharq Insurance to establish the largest cultural project in the capital

AL-SHARQ Insurance Co has signed a contract for the purchase of a parcel of land on Kasr El-Nil Street with a value of LE140mn in order to establish the largest cultural project in the heart of the capital. Signing the contract was Borham Attallah, head of Al-Sharq Insurance, and from the Ministry of Interior which owned the land. Ahmed Sabri, undersecretary to the minister of interior and head of the land projects division of the ministry. Attallah said that the aim of this purchase is to establish a cultural project in the heart of the capital.

In addition to an arts and cultural centre, the project will have a supermarket of the highest quality. For businessmen and

investors, the project will feature a five-star hotel, complete with a business centre and telecommunications office. The project will also be furnished with an amply-sized parking garage.

The selection of a consultancy firm has been completed, to prepare the necessary designing for the project at the highest level possible.

Attallah explained that financial institutions, such as insurance companies, have a necessary and important role to play in society. He added that Al-Sharq Insurance Co must, as such a financial institution, take part in a variety of investment projects for the sake of the national economy.

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The Republic of Korea celebrates its Liberation Day

Four-party meeting to promote peace on the Korean peninsula

ON 16 APRIL of this year, Republic of Korea President Kim Young-Sam and US President Bill Clinton made an offer of four-way peace talks, proposing that North Korea and China join the two nations. The epochal move, announced following a Kim-Clinton summit meeting on Cheju-do Island, is designed, as specified in their joint announcement, "to initiate a process aimed at achieving a permanent peace agreement" on the Korean Peninsula. The proposal, which set no preconditions, calls for South and North Korea to be the key participants while the United States and China — their respective wartime allies — would play the supporting roles.

The proposal for a four-party meeting is a groundbreaking overture. Since the end of the Korean War (1950-53), only an Armistice Agreement has maintained a fragile truce. No peace treaty has ever been signed, meaning that the two Koreas are still technically at war.

The proposal for four-way talks is part of measures to counter the North's consistent attempts to undo the Armistice Agreement. Tensions increased on the Inter-Korean border when the North Korean People's Army in Panmunjom, the only crossing point in the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) separating the two Koreas, announced on 4 April that it was giving up its responsibilities under the armistice accord to help maintain and administer the buffer zone.

On several occasions in the following days, the North Korean military sent armed troops into the Panmunjom Joint Security Area (JSA) inside the DMZ buffer zone in a show of force. The North Korean Navy made similar incursions in the seas off the West Coast. These inter-

national violations of the Armistice Agreement were the latest in a series of moves aimed at invalidating the agreement and thus pressuring the United States to negotiate a peace treaty with Pyongyang.

North Korea has maintained that the transformation of the truce mechanism into a lasting peace regime should be realised through a peace agreement with the United States. It says that the two countries are the direct parties to the Armistice Agreement. The North claims that the South should be left out of the peace negotiations because it is not a signatory of the 1953 Armistice Agreement.

The agreement was signed by the US general commanding the UN forces and the commanders of the Chinese and North Korean troops. South Korea did not sign the armistice accord because then President Syngman Rhee thought unification was at hand and opposed the US plan to call a truce. Korea was, nevertheless, a party to the agreement as the US general signed on behalf of all the UN forces of which Korea was a part.

The North's demand for an exclusive peace treaty with Washington, while it is in line with its long-standing policy of regarding Seoul as an illegitimate regime, is aimed at forcing US forces out of South Korea.

In fact, Pyongyang has long been endeavoring to invalidate the armistice accord with a view to pressuring Washington to sign a peace treaty with it on achieving its ultimate goal of ousting US troops stationed in South Korea since the Korean War.

In April 1994, North Korea forced out neutral peace observers from its side of the border, including Polish

delegates to the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC), an armistice monitoring watchdog, and closed its office in Panmunjom, the truce village. The symbolic move was then followed by the announcement on 4 April this year that it would give up its responsibility for maintaining the DMZ and the consequent series of armed incursions into the DMZ, which raised the highest security tensions since the nuclear disputes.

Despite the heightening of tension, both South Korea and the United States held firm to their position that a new peace framework on the Korean Peninsula should be negotiated between the two Koreas. President Clinton made it clear after his Cheju summit talks with Kim that Washington would not consider separate negotiations with North Korea on a peace treaty or related issues.



President Kim Young-Sam

Compiled by: Mohamed Yousef Habib

He also reiterated Washington's position that the present armistice arrangement should be maintained until it is succeeded by a permanent peace agreement.

North Korea has still neither accepted nor rejected the proposal for four-way talks, saying it is still "considering" the offer. This is noteworthy since North Korea's rejection to many previous proposals by the South has been outright rejection. While putting off an official response, the North said it would need a detailed explanation on what could be achieved before deciding whether to accept the proposal. The reaction is regarded as part of North Korea's efforts to buy time in line with its larger plan to resolve its economic difficulties and end its isolation from the rest of the world.

Last year, Pyongyang appealed for outside food aid for the first time and is eager to obtain more food aid to relieve severe shortages on a short-term basis and an infusion of resources to resuscitate its crippled economy in the long run. It also wants the United States to ease economic sanctions beyond the modest gestures made more than a year ago following the nuclear accord reached between Washington and Pyongyang. Under the pact, North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear programme, which was suspected of producing weapons-grade plutonium, in return for the provision of two less threatening light-water nuclear reactors and closer relations with the United States.

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Message from Yim Sung-Joon, ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Egypt, on the occasion of Korean Liberation Day

Today marks the day in 1945 when Korea was freed from thirty-six years of Japanese occupation. In the half century since liberation, Korea has experienced a great deal of turmoil including: a civil war, periods of military rule and the continuing division of the Korean people in the North and the South. These formidable obstacles have been wisely surmounted by our people's resolve to make Korea what it is today — a model of development with a vibrant democracy and the eleventh largest economy in the world.



Ambassador Yim Sung-Joon

Our country has suffered much in the past, and this day is set aside for the Korean people to take stock of that past, so that our people will never forget those that built Korea up from the ashes of occupation and civil war. That said, this day also provides us with the opportunity to dream of a new future — the first World Cup ever to be staged in Asia will be jointly held by Korea and Japan. Japan, who once colonised us, has become one of Korea's primary economic partners and a close bond exists between our two countries. Together, Korea and Japan will bring the greatest single sporting event to the entire world with style and distinction. Both nations are dedicated to making the first World Cup of the twenty-first century the best ever.

The occasion of Korean Liberation Day also affords us the opportunity to look at the place Korea is taking in the world, both politically and economically.

Korea is pledged to playing a more constructive role in international affairs. Korea is cooperating with other members of the United Nations and playing a more active role in forging peace and security in our world. Korea has sent peace-keeping forces to Angola, Somalia and Western Sahara to help actualise UN policy in these troubled areas. Korea has also provided assistance to the Palestinian Authority in the hope that Palestinians will be able to provide for themselves a better future and thereby contribute to the establishment of a lasting and just peace in the region. Korea is committed to seeing economic development and positive change in the Middle East and Africa, and by working with the United Nations and our friends in the region we hope to see tangible results. Furthermore, Korea's own development over the last fifty years can be a model that other nations can borrow as they embark on their development programmes. Korea is committed to seeing greater progress not only in North-East Asia, but throughout the world.

Economically, much has changed in Korea the last fifty years. Last year, Korea's trade volume was over 260 billion US dollars, the twelfth highest in the world. Compare that with 477 million dollars in total trade only twenty-five years ago and you can see the huge quantitative leap Korea has made. Today, quality Korean nameplates have become household names throughout the globe.

Our cordial relations with Egypt exemplifies the type of bilateral friendships Korea wants to pursue. It has been just over a year since Korea and Egypt established full diplomatic relations with each other. Since April of 1995, our two countries have witnessed greater cooperation in economic, political, diplomatic and cultural matters. Korea recognises that Egypt is a leading country in this region. We extend high tribute to His Excellency, President Hosni Mubarak, in recognition of his leadership in not only overseeing the recent economic reforms in Egypt, but also in playing a leading role in bringing peace to the region.

Egypt is playing an important role in Korea's economic expansion. Together, our two peoples have set up a number of joint ventures here in Egypt to build cars, ships, electronic equipment and more. These ventures not only employ Egyptians, but also provide the Egyptian buyer with high quality consumer goods at a reasonable price. Korean initiative and technology is giving the Egyptian consumer a greater choice of goods and services.

In return, Korea is also investing actively in Egypt. Not only are Korean-owned plants producing goods for the domestic market and for export, but Korean firms are investing in oil and gas exploration, as well as in the banking sector. Korea and Egypt are working together to improve each other's economies and standards of living.

In the coming years we can only hope that the strong ties between Korea and Egypt will continue to grow, for this is the desire of my people and assuredly that too of Egypt's. Together, our two countries have much to offer one another and cooperation should be the hallmark of our two governments and peoples.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE PEOPLE OF KOREA on LIBERATION DAY



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هكذا من الأصل

The Republic of Korea celebrates its Liberation Day

Quest for peace and prosperity of the global village

IN SPITE of the problems posed by North Korea, the Kim presidency has been marked by milestones for the Asia-Pacific region — most notably the leadership role he has played in the creation of a new regional order. At successive Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summits — in Seattle and Bogor — President Kim has established the Republic of Korea as a vital bridge between the needs and aspirations of developed and developing nations. The third APEC Leaders' Forum — in Osaka, Japan in November 1995 — will undoubtedly provide an even more important

forum for Korea to develop its growing Asia-Pacific role. Meanwhile, at the UN's World Summit for Sociological Development in Copenhagen, Denmark, in March 1995, President Kim went further — pledging to share Korea's developmental experience with developing countries around the globe — as he sought to increase the role his country plays in contributing to the peace and prosperity of the entire global village. The foundation for Korea's new role is President Kim's *Segyehwa* or globalisation policy.

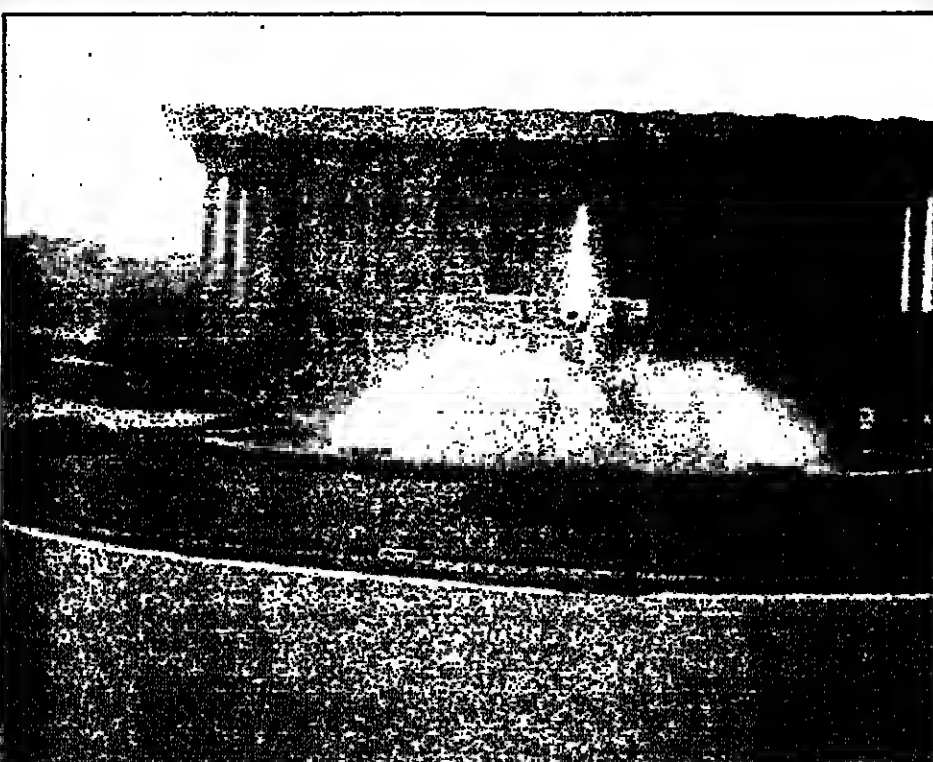
President Kim's commitment to world peace and the welfare of the global community continues to expand beyond the actions he has taken on the crucial North Korea issue. He has significantly increased the assistance Korea gives to overseas development through the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) contributions and Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) activities. In recognition of his democratic reform efforts both as a long-time opposition leader and as the new civilian president of Korea, he

received the Averell Harriman Democracy Award from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs in Washington, DC in November 1993. Also, President Kim has been recognised for his efforts to promote freedom, democracy and human rights in Korea, and, in January 1995, he received the Martin Luther King Jr. Non-violent Peace Prize. In October 1995, he received the prestigious Global Leadership Award of the United Nations Association of the USA, which is an important international reward for President Kim's unceasing con-

tribution to global peace, security and welfare. The globalisation policy President Kim pursues is based on the premise that the Republic of Korea should contribute as much as it possibly can to the international community. In formally addressing the North Korean issue, in offering developmental assistance to poorer countries, and in playing a bridging role between developed and developing nations, President Kim is strongly convinced that the ultimate reward of peace and prosperity for all of the Asia-Pacific region — and beyond — can most certainly be achieved.



Modern sculpture is exhibited in the streets for all to see



The National Theatre in Seoul

The supply of rice to North Korea

SINCE taking office in February 1993, President Kim Young Sam has consistently emphasised the importance of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation in maintaining peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula. He also stressed that the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula were essential to promoting peace and prosperity not only in Northeast Asia, but also in the world, and has endeavored tirelessly toward this end.

It was in this context that President Kim expressed our readiness to provide the North with grain aid in a speech to three German institutes of international relations in Berlin on 7 March 1995, and again offered to provide rice to the North without any preconditions in his address to the General Assembly of the International Press Institute in Seoul on 15 May 1995.

On 21 June 1995, South and North Korean negotiators agreed in Beijing that the South would provide the North with 150,000 tons of rice on a gratis basis. The first South Korean ship in 50 years, loaded with 2,000 tons of rice, set historical sail from the port of Tonghae in Kangwondo Province on 25 June 1995, and arrived at the North Korean port of Chongjin at 4pm on 26 June 1995. The 150,000 tons of rice was supplied to North Korea on 10 August 1995.

This supply of rice has resulted from President Kim Young Sam's historic decision to demonstrate compassion for our fellow brethren in the North by trying to alleviate their present suffering due to food shortages. This is also significant in that it represents the largest and most substantive, not to mention humanitarian, instance of inter-Korean cooperation since the division of the peninsula in 1945.

The times are dictating that the South and North should refrain from wasteful competition and engage in mutual dialogue and cooperation, thereby making progress towards achieving the long-cherished dream of national unification.

President Kim Young Sam has done his utmost to try to peacefully resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. The Republic of Korea's decision to shoulder the brunt of the US\$4bn cost entailed in supplying light-water reactors (LWRs) to the North and will greatly contribute to an eventual de-nuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

This unconditional grant of rice to North Korea in addition to our role in the LWR project, will mark another milestone in building a basis for substantive peace on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea is now suffering from a serious food shortage, as it is far less than self-sufficient in terms of food. The supply of rice to the North will not only help ameliorate the pain and hardship the North Koreans are experiencing in their daily lives, but can also serve as a catalyst for mutual exchange and cooperation through increased dialogue between the two sides.

The decision to supply rice to the North without any preconditions was made out of a pure desire to help the Northern fellow brethren from a humanitarian standpoint. This represents an important breakthrough in the improvement of South-North relations. This could also turn out to be a historic setting point in ensuring substantive peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, and furthermore, in achieving the peaceful reunification of South and North Korea.

Daewoo planning to occupy 4th place worldwide

DAEWOO Motors of Korea plans to occupy 4th place in worldwide automobile production by the year 2000. This strategy falls in line with the expansion and growth of Daewoo, whose operations are considered the embodiment of success in the Republic of Korea's automobile industry, an industry that is rapidly moving up the ladder in world automobile production.

Since the company has been permitted to export its automobiles to Europe last year (after the lifting of the ban imposed on it by General Motors for exporting to Europe and the United States), a number of its centres have been established in England, Bulgaria, France and Germany. Every time that Daewoo has entered a new European market, it has quickly oc-

cupied a high rank in sales; proof of the superiority of the Korean automobile industry. Daewoo, however, is not satisfied with this level of success alone, for it has hastened to purchase automobile factories in Eastern bloc countries to expand its production. There is no doubt that Daewoo will be met with the same run of success

that it saw during the last year.

Daewoo has also purchased four factories in the Russian republics. In addition to one in Romania and Poland. In an unprecedented move, the company also purchased Daimler of Austria, the largest engine designing company in the world. This is in addition to its factories currently under construction in India.

Expanding within Egypt

WITHIN the framework of expanding its operations within Egypt, Abul-Futuh for Motor and Trade Co. has concluded an agreement which makes Al-Musallama Co. in Zagazig, an authorised distributor of Daewoo automobiles. A similar agreement was made with Fast Car, making it an authorised distributor in El-Minya.

The agreements have been made with the aim of increasing services for Daewoo automobiles within the heart and soul of the country, facilitating sales and service operations to its customers, rather than being centred in Cairo only.

Daewoo Tico now available in the Egyptian market

ABUL-FUTUH for Motor and Trade Co., the sole agent for Daewoo in Egypt and one of the companies organised by the Abul-Futuh Organisation, announces the availability of the compact-sized Tico model automobile in the Egyptian market. This comes after the model was shown for the first time at Automak 1995, where it was ranked most

popular by the Egyptian market.

The introduction of the Tico comes after the major success of the Racer and Espiro models, both of which have 1500cc engines. Likewise the success of its luxury model, the Salon de Prince, with a 2000cc engine, made a formidable impression with businessmen and major

companies in Egypt.

The Tico is a compact automobile with an 800cc engine with every option available to the customer including: air conditioning, radio/cassette player, power windows and automatic transmission. While the engine may be small, the Tico is capable of reaching 41 horsepower, using only 1 litre of gasoline every 24 kilo-

metres. The Tico also comes in a wide variety of colours to meet the tastes of young buyers.

Al-Futuh for Motor and Trade also offers its customers spare parts at its service and maintenance centres.

In offering this model to the Egyptian market, Daewoo hopes that it has met the demands of its customers.



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Kamal El-Batanouni: Forsaken pastures



Tooth-brush trees and medicinal herbs may be a discovery for the Western-educated. But he has spent a life-time in the desert, and knows the arid landscapes well



Playing in the cotton plantations and running about among the fruit trees in Ghamrein, Kamal El-Batanouni had no idea that his fascination with plants would last a life-time. He did not know then that he would become one of Egypt's leading botanists, earning a PhD in plant ecology in 1963, and an ScD in the same field in 1985. He became an expert on desert plant life, roaming the deserts from one end of the Arab region to the other. He taught in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Kuwait and Sudan. His botanical treasure-hunts took him to Europe, India and the Americas.

As vice-dean of Cairo University's Faculty of Science (1994 to the present), president of the Vienna-based International Organisation for Human Ecology (1984-89) and president of the Egyptian Botanical Society (1987 to the present), El-Batanouni is a very busy man. His scientific activities consume almost all his time, and he is very often away on missions or attending conferences.

His office space smacks of the occupant's practical nature. A long conference table divides the room. A small desk is placed to one side on which books and flowers are neatly arranged. A Botus stands in a vase on the table, and two microscopes stand guard, as impressive as the Qasr El-Nil lions if more technologically sophisticated. The daylight which poured into the room from the large windows contributed to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to thought and meditation.

Kamal El-Batanouni was born on 30 January 1936 in Menoufiya. His father was an Arabic teacher employed by the Ministry of Education. His mother had obtained the primary school certificate, "which no doubt was an achievement at that time, when the greater majority of rural women were illiterate. Women of her generation either helped their husbands in field work, or remained behind closed doors. My mother did not wear the *higab* or *nigab* as we know them today, but simply wore the *bfia* (a Turkish style of veil which covers the face but not the eyes)."

Sent to Cairo to obtain the secondary school certificate, he enrolled in a school run by a charity organisation. "Schools were considered institutions with a mission rather than investment enterprises, hence were often off-shoots of charities or philanthropic organisations of some sort or another." He applied to the Faculty of Law, but was told that the quota of students for the year had already been filled, and was advised to apply to the Faculty of Science, graduates of which were in great demand. This he did. It was 1952, a year of beginnings and ends.

In 1956, he obtained a BSc, cum laude, in chemistry and botany. "My fascination with the desert and desert plants had begun. My interest had been stimulated the same year by trips to the desert conducted by Dr Hussein Said, then the head of the botany section. Teacher-student relations at the time were especially strong. I was also fortunate to

have been a student of Vivy Tockholm, who loved the desert and spent her whole life in the study of desert plants."

El-Batanouni chose to study desert plants for his Masters. He worked on a site situated at kilometre 34 on the Cairo-Suez road. References on desert plants in Egypt were scarce, and the only ones available were about vegetation in deserts elsewhere, especially in California.

His early research (1960) on seasonal changes in desert vegetation brought to light new realities. His study of natural seed banks, conducted when he was only 20, is considered a pivotal work in the conservation of rare species basic for the support of biodiversity.

His doctoral dissertation was entitled "Water Economy of Desert Plants in Wadi Hof," where he studied how plants resisted harsh aridity. "My field work usually began at one o'clock in the afternoon and lasted for 48 hours of uninterrupted observation and registration of data." He attributes his keen interest in desert plants to his awareness that they represent Egypt's food security for the future.

He married in the traditional way in 1965. Ahmed was born in 1969, followed by Hassan in 1976. But straight after the wedding ceremony, El-Batanouni was off again, on a scientific mission to Hungary which lasted until September 1968. There, he discovered a region where conditions were similar to those prevailing in the Egyptian deserts. "The Hungarians were surprised to watch me dig

holes in the ground, one metre deep and eight metres wide, to measure the root spread of plants — work that entailed considerable physical effort." After Hungary, he went to Iraq, then to Germany for a year of further research. He took along seeds of plants which grow in the Egyptian deserts and planted them in order to measure the respiration of desert plants. His findings were published in 13 scientific monographs.

El-Batanouni's scientific endeavours are not limited to his field. He is a firm believer in holistic knowledge and in teamwork. He acted as research consultant for medicinal plants at a pharmaceutical company, worked closely with the National Research Centre's pharmaceutical studies laboratory and with the Public Pharmaceutical Organisation. In cooperation with the Suez Canal University, he studied medicinal plants grown in Sinai. He has been a member of the committee for medicinal plants at the Ministry of Scientific Research since 1965.

Herbs have been used for therapeutic purposes in Egypt since prehistoric times. Long lists of medicinal plants and prescriptions were written up by the ancient Egyptians. For more than 12 centuries, Muslim herbalists wrote innumerable treatises and books on these plants and their medicinal uses. The great surge of public interest in the use of plants as medicines has been based on the assumption that these resources will be available on a continuing basis. But no systematic effort has been made to en-

sure this. In the late 1950s, one could easily collect specimens of plants used in folk medicine, like *Bryonia cretica* or *Colebitum*. Now, it's almost impossible to find a single specimen of these two genera. The disappearance of medicinal plants also means the loss of indigenous knowledge of medicinal healers.

Poor management, however, may well mean that the process of destruction will continue. "Recent range rehabilitation programmes have focused on exotics of questionable ecological adaptation. But overgrazing is still a great menace in rangelands. Almost every species of shrub and tree is destroyed for fuel. Some species are felled for special purposes, like *Salvadora persica* or tooth-brush tree."

El-Batanouni is a prolific researcher and writer. Rather than settle back into a cushy professional armchair — as many professors, exhausted by the rigours of post-graduate work, would be only too pleased to do — he is pushing for university regulations to be amended. Promotion to the post of professor should not be the final station in the life of the academician, we should copy the system applied in British universities," he is, rather, in favour of a system whereby professors would be continuously required to pursue research and to publish works, as a basis for an ongoing evaluation of their contributions.

Profile by Ragi Halim

Pack of cards

by Madame Sosostri

♦ The Eighth Festival for Music and Song opened last Saturday in the open air theatre of Salheddin's Citadel, called the *makha* — a name which at once conjures up visions of long storytelling evenings *a la Scheherazade*, although, if I may be allowed to venture an opinion on the last occupants of the premises, they were in the habit of indulging in more vigorous activities. Well anyway, there I was wrapped up in my cashmere, at the highest and coldest point of the Citadel. And guess who was there before me: the well-known conductor Youssef El-Sissi, himself very elegant in a dark blue suit, busy adjusting the lights so that they would form a perfect circle on the stage. I was soon distracted from El-Sissi's efforts by the arrival of our Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni, just in time to open the festival officially. Farouk Hosni rewarded Youssef El-Sissi, former head of the Conservatoire Samiha El-Kholi and opera singer Regina Youssef with awards of excellence for their contributions to the world of music. As usual elegantly brief and to the point, the minister called the lucky winners on stage. This is when I realised how handsomely El-Sissi's efforts had been rewarded: there, in a halo of light, stood the three award recipients, positively glowing with pleasure. Having given credit where it was due, the audience settled down as Mustafa Nagul walked briskly on-stage to conduct the Cairo Festival Orchestra. With the first measures of Mendelssohn's Italian symphony, however, a gust of wind rushed through the amplifiers and drowned out the music, roaring angrily at the competition. Even Hassan Sharara's violin had to concede defeat. At first, as crashes echoed through my inner ear, I was under the impression that immense creative effort had been made to integrate atonal music into the tried-and-true golden oldies through the clever use of percussion, but I was soon snapped out of my delusion by my ear-drums, which had begun to bleed. Well dear, that's one concert gone with the wind — or so I thought. The very next day, the minister of culture called for a committee to be formed in order to place windbreakers in strategic locations which would take care of the sound distortion. I, for one, am looking forward to seeing the problem solved. Open-air concerts are so up-lifting. Besides this is a golden opportunity to hear good music without the inconvenience of having to wear your Sunday — or Friday — best, and the chance of a lifetime to take the children along. In those wide-open spaces, their merry shrieks as they contrive to push each other off the parapets are almost muted. Don't you believe that the little ones do not look forward to these concerts. Why, I saw a little seven-year-old being dragged away, practically in tears. She even refused the ice cream I was offering to get her, if she left quietly. Her mother, a fine musician herself, explained that the girl had been waiting for the second part of the concert for a week and now it was all spoiled. At this point I had to run because I had had my full ration of dis-

cordant noise for the evening but I do hope that the little girl knows that the regrettable state of affairs will be looked into seriously.

♦ There seems to be no end to the number of awards our Nobel Prize winner Nagul Mahfouz can collect. This time, it was the government of the Republic of Chile who awarded him the prestigious Gabriela Mistral medal, in an small ceremony presided over by Ambassador Nelson Haddad Heresi and attended by all the embassy staff. I was so disappointed not to attend, being on vacation in Chile myself, but I made a note to be there the very next time our great writer is honoured.

♦ Our own Nawal El-Mahallawi, head of Al-Ahram's Translation and Publishing Centre, recently hosted a luncheon at the Al-Ahram restaurant in honour of Youssef Yazbeck Haddad, Samiha El-Kholi and Youssef El-Sissi at the Festival of Music and Song which opened on 11 August at El-Makha Theatre in the Citadel.



Clockwise: H.E. Dr Nelson Haddad Heresi, ambassador of Chile to Egypt congratulating Nagul Mahfouz; Egypt in the Twenty-First Century: Hopes and Challenges, edited by Dr Osama El-Baz; The Muslims of America, edited by Youssef Yazbeck Haddad; Regina Youssef, Samiha El-Kholi and Youssef El-Sissi at the Festival of Music and Song which opened on 11 August at El-Makha Theatre in the Citadel



ways ready to rise to a challenge. I leafed through the pages, imagining that it would be boring predictions about how technology will change our lives and how we should learn to use computers, but within minutes I was so engrossed I read it from cover to cover. Good for you, Nawal. Let's hope the centre has more goodies in store...

♦ On 15 August, India will have been independent



and turquoise sari for the occasion. One has so few opportunities to dress formally these days.

♦ But before I grace the Indian Independence Day celebrations, I popped over to see my dear friends at the Pakistani Embassy. There I was dressed more modestly, in a beige *silwar kameez* and a flattering cream veil, inspired by my heroine, Benazir Bhutto. The Pakistani event was quite something. I felt distinctly at home. The function was held on the premises of the embassy and was attended by scores of bearded young men from Pakistan studying at Al-Azhar University. My dear friend the Charge d'Affaires of Pakistan to Egypt, Nawafullah Khan, hoisted the green and white Pakistani flag crowned with a crescent and star. It was a terrific sight, with the star-studded summer's night as background to the grand occasion. My little darlings, the students at the Pakistan International School in Cairo, presented the national song to the delighted guests. I then rushed to the open buffet to pile my plate with mouth-watering tandooris, succulent biryani morsels and a wide range of delicious Pakistani dishes. No alcohol was served, of course — tea is so much better for the digestion. No matter, that was indeed a night to remember.

♦ As I told you last week, our colleague Gamal Nkrumah and his lovely wife Ghada El-Hennawi are now the proud parents of a strapping baby boy, Karim. As you may also know, I always like to be on top of events, and I therefore decided to look for a match among the Al-Ahram family. It is never too soon to take these decisions, I always say. With the shortage of flats and the rising prices of furniture, Karim would do well to get a head start. I told his parents, "Well, would you believe it? Right here at the Weekly, I found Karim's future bride. Amira El-Ahmed was just about to have a baby girl, imagine, then, my surprise when Amira and her husband, our colleague Osama Khalil, announced the birth of twins, Nabila and Mariam. There go my match-making plans... but I shudder to think of the heavy burden of choice already hanging over Karim's tiny shoulders."